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SELECTED RUSSIAN  
SHORT STORIES

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# SELECTED RUSSIAN SHORT STORIES

CHOSEN AND TRANSLATED  
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**ANTON CHEKHOV, 1860-1904**

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## INTRODUCTION

THE short story has always played an important part in Russian literature, and it has been admirably utilized by the Russian writers of fiction. Not being hampered by any conventions of the book trade, nor by the demands of circulating libraries, they have been able to develop their art in the form that was best suited to their subjects and their literary bent. We are surprised, when looking through catalogues of Russian books, to find side by side with the long novel numberless volumes of short stories or novelettes, and it is therefore essential that the student who wishes to form a true estimate of the value of Russian fiction should become acquainted with the Russian short story.

Russian fiction is divided into the novel—*Román*, the novelette—*Póvjest*, and the tale—*Razskáz*. These designations simply denote the length and scope of the work. The *Román*, especially with the older writers, often represents works in three or four volumes; the *Póvjest* is a short novel ranging from about fifty to a couple of hundred pages, and the *Razskáz* is a tale of about fifty or sixty pages and is often in several chapters. The last form seems peculiarly adapted to the genius and character of the Russian nation, in which we so often find brilliancy and talent without the power of long sustained effort.

The first examples of Russian literature are to be found in the *Byliny*—the Sagas of Russia—which date from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. To that period also belong the specimens of ecclesiastical works—chronicles, lives of saints and martyrs, and the



beautiful prose-poem *The Campaign of Igor*—which have come down to us.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century Russia fell under the Tartar yoke, and the dark period of her history commenced when the intercourse that was developing with Western Europe was broken off, and but few and unimportant literary works were produced for many centuries. It was only in the sixteenth century that the nation, recovering from the effort of expelling the barbarians, found energy to spare for the arts of peace. Trade again brought East and West closer together; foreigners began to visit Russia for the purposes of commerce, and this intercourse became still closer during the reigns of the first Romanovs, when Peter the Great opened his window towards the West by founding his new capital of St Petersburg. From that time foreigners began to flow into Russia, settled there, established business connexions, organized industry, and brought with them the intellectual culture of the West. During the reigns of Peter's successors, who all encouraged literature, science and art, Western influences were predominant. French and German models were accepted and copied, and the first examples of modern Russian literature were produced in the works of the poets Lomonossov, Derzhavin, Fonvizin, etc. These works are all of the formal and classical style that was then in vogue in Western Europe, and, though often of high merit, would scarcely appeal to the general reader of the present day.

The older literature was entirely the product of the aristocracy and of the landed gentry, who enjoyed a much higher standard of education than the rest of the nation, and could devote their leisure to literary work. With the Napoleonic wars, however, a revolt against French influences set in. During their European campaigns the officers saw more of the Western world, and were able to judge of the differences that existed between the standards of civilization there and in Russia. They brought back new ideas, new ideals,



new desires, and their influence gradually led to the various reforms that took place in Russia during the last century. The progress was, however, very slow. With the dawn of the romantic movement we find that the glamour of Byron and Scott was felt in Russia as elsewhere, and we see in the works of the two great poets, Pushkin and Lermontov, strong traces of their influence. Another author whose works have likewise left their mark on the minds of the Russians of that period is the German romance writer, E. T. Hoffmann. Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, the opening story of this volume, and *Christmas Eve*, by Gogol, have much of the weirdness that is characteristic of Hoffmann. In later years German philosophical and ethical doctrines continued to play a great part in Russian mentality, but at the same time there was a general endeavour not to follow foreign models, but to produce a truly national literature. This led to the great age of Russian naturalistic fiction in the works of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, and caused the Russian novel to become famous all the world over.

After the most brilliant period of Russian literature, during the middle decades of the last century, when the chief works of the great trio of Russian novelists and short-story writers saw the light, we come to the period that may be called the age of Chekhov—the age *par excellence* of the short story, as during the last forty years many of the most gifted and representative authors have devoted their talents almost exclusively to this form of fiction and to the drama. In these branches of literature some of them have also attained a world-wide reputation, as, for example, Chekhov and Gorky.

However, it is not only the highest peaks that form the mountain range; nor the greatest authors who alone produce the literature of a nation, and though it has been our endeavour to select as representative a collection of Russian short stories as the size of this volume would permit, there are many authors whose works had to be omitted.



This volume comprises a selection of short stories chosen from the works of the most eminent writers who have lived during the last hundred years, and have by their works raised Russian literature to a standard equal to that attained by the literature of any other European nation. Indeed, there are some of them who rank among the very greatest writers of all times, and the names of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy have become household words among all cultivated people.

The reader will perhaps be surprised not to find any work by Tolstoy in this volume. The reason of this omission is not that he did not write short stories (he has many admirable ones), but because his works are already largely represented in the 'World's Classics' in the authoritative translations of Mr and Mrs Aylmer Maude, and in consequence the space that by right ought to have been allotted to him has been given to others, who, if not so great, have, by describing various phases of the national life, done much to make Russia, as yet so little known or understood, more familiar to Western readers, who so often gauge it by their own standards and according to their own views of life, quite regardless of the difference of the conditions under which the nations have developed and exist.

The first name in this collection is that of Pushkin (1799-1837) who ranks in the forefront of Russian bards; he is looked upon as Russia's greatest poet and still enjoys immense popularity. He wrote, besides much lyrical poetry, many stories in verse, plays, a long novel in verse, *Eugeni Onegin*, his greatest work, and several prose stories. From his schooldays he was known for his wit and sarcasm, and many of his epigrams and political squibs were circulated in society. These soon attracted the attention of the authorities, and Pushkin was banished to Odessa, where he was given a government post; afterwards he was sent to his mother's estate in the Pakov Government. In 1726, however, the Emperor Nicholas I,



who was a great admirer of Pushkin's genius, recalled the poet and gave him permission to reside in the capitals. Pushkin again accepted a government appointment, but he was never entirely exempted from police surveillance. He was killed in a duel in 1837.

Gogol (1809-52), a Ukrainian by birth, is perhaps Russia's greatest humorist. Many of his tales are much in Hoffmann's style, weird and uncanny, but they are full of inimitable touches of wit and humour and characteristic national types. His chief works are *Dead Souls*, a satirical novel, and *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*), a comedy in which he satirized the provincial bureaucracy.

Another poet, Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov (1814-1841), was an officer in the Guards. He was much in the Caucasus, which forms the background of most of his poems. He was greatly influenced by Byron, and had a similar gloomy outlook on life and the world. His most popular poem, the *Demon*, gives the story of a Circassian girl's love for a mysterious and sombre demon. He also wrote one long work of fiction, *The Hero of our Times*, and several short stories. *The Hero of our Times* may be looked upon as the first Russian novel of character, and it leads the way from the older novels of action to the modern psychological fiction. Lermontov, like Pushkin, fell a victim to the theories of honour of his day and was killed in a duel.

In Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev (1818-83) we find the pioneer of those writers who brought the Russian novel to the notice of Western Europe. He was a descendant of a family of landowners, and was educated partly in Russia and partly in Germany, and lived in France during the last years of his life. He wrote many novels, short stories, and plays, mostly character-sketches and psychological studies. There is but little action in his stories, but his prose is exquisite, musical, and extremely elegant. He has given us wonderful pictures of various types of the people of his day, from the village schoolgirl to the political plotter. Like so many Russian writers he was banished to his



estate in consequence of an obituary article he wrote on Gogol, but he was allowed to return to St Petersburg in 1853, where he became the centre of the literary world. From that time to his death his fame increased, not only in Russia but in Europe, and his works were translated into many languages. *Asya*, the story we give, is one of his best novelettes.

The second of the great novelists is Fedor Mikhaylovich Dostoevsky (1821-87). He and Tolstoy may be considered as the greatest masters of the psychological novel. His father was a doctor in Moscow, where Dostoevsky was born and educated. In 1838 he entered the Military Engineers' School in St Petersburg and obtained his commission in 1841, but he left the service after three years. In 1845 he published his first novel, *Poor Folk*. A few years later he joined the Socialist circle of Petrashevsky, and in 1848 all the members of this circle were arrested, and after a prolonged trial, were sentenced to death, but, when brought to the scaffold, they were reprieved. Dostoevsky was sent to hard labour in Siberia for four years, and after serving his time he was sent to the army as a private soldier. However, he was soon allowed to leave the service, but he had to live in Siberia for another nine years, only obtaining his pardon in 1859, when he returned to St Petersburg. The result of his ordeal in Siberia is the *Memoirs from the House of Death*, which gives his experiences as a convict. From this year (1862) he began publishing the immortal novels which raised him to the highest position among the world's writers of fiction. He wrote but few short stories. The one we give, *A Nasty Story*, is a good example of his method of developing characters and moods.

Vsevolod Mikhaylovich Garshin's (1855-1888) works are composed entirely of short stories, but they are of exceptional merit. During the Turkish War Garshin served as a volunteer in the army, and some of his stories give his experiences at the front. During his last years he suffered from a mental disorder, and in



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*The Red Flower* he gives us a terrible picture of a madman, drawn from his own experience. His life ended in suicide. His stories are vivid though sad, and he has evidently been much influenced by Tolstoy, both in ideas and in style.

It was in the beginning of the eighties, a period of reaction and gloom in Russia following the assassination of Alexander II, that Anton Pavlovich Chekhov began to publish his first stories, thus forming a connecting link with the older authors, Turgenev and Dostoevsky, who were approaching the end of their lives, and Tolstoy, who at that time had ceased writing fiction and devoted his mind to ethical and religious subjects. Chekhov's father had been a serf, but he had formed an independent position for himself, and had been able to give his children a fairly good education. Chekhov had studied medicine at the Moscow University, and in 1884 he took a doctor's degree, but he soon gave up practice and turned his energies to literature. His first works, which were humorous stories, published in 1879 in magazines, soon became popular. He wrote chiefly short stories, and is essentially the describer of the middle classes. In many ways he is like Turgenev, having the same admirable style and the same power of representing his characters without deeply analyzing them in the manner of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. He has pathos and humour, and almost all his writings are of an equal merit. He also wrote several plays in a style so novel that at first they were not understood, but when acted by Stanislavsky's celebrated Moscow company they had immense success.

Side by side with Anton Chekhov another remarkable figure, Maxim Gorky (b. 1868), appeared on the literary horizon. He, too, rose from the people, being the son of an upholsterer, who died when Gorky was quite a child. His mother took him to Nizhni-Novgorod and left him with her father, who practised the trade of a dyer. Gorky received no proper education, and was apprenticed early to various artisans;

among other occupations he was at one time a street hawker, the assistant cook on a Volga steamboat, and a clerk in an office. He published his first story in 1892 in a provincial newspaper. His themes were new—tales of the under-world, written from personal experience, in a bright and lively style, giving pictures of the life of tramps, hawkers, Volga boatmen—and a new world was revealed to the reader. He also wrote plays, one of which, *The Lower Depths*, had an enormous success owing to its sensational character. Gorky always belonged to the Revolutionary party in Russia, and in 1917 he joined the Bolsheviki though he condemned their violent methods.

Our next author, Alexandr Kuprin (b. 1870), is the son of a government official. He was educated in a military school and became an officer, but resigned his commission after four years in order to turn to literature. His first stories were about military life. He has written many novels and tales. His style is excellent and he knows how to tell a good story.

However, the only writer who can be said to have rivalled the popularity of Gorky during this century is Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev (1871-1919). His family belonged to the intelligensia of Orel, where he was born. He studied at the University of Moscow and became a lawyer, but he had begun writing already as a student and soon gave himself up to literature. His works are all in the style of Edgar Allan Poe and Maeterlinck, weird, mysterious, and symbolic, often sensational, and they soon attracted the public notice.

Thus we have shown the development of the Russian story during the last century from the romantic tale of action through the sentimental story of Turgenev, popular during the middle of the nineteenth century, and the psychological fiction of Dostoevsky to the realistic methods of Chekhov and Gorky, the philosophical problems of Kuprin and the symbolic and weird tales of Andreev.



# ALEXANDER SERGEEVICH PUSHKIN

1799-1837

## THE QUEEN OF SPADES

The Queen of Spades denotes secret malevolence.  
FROM THE NEWEST FORTUNE-TELLING BOOK

### I

On days dreary and wet  
It was often they met;  
May God save them, in play  
They would pass the whole day.  
The stakes they would double,  
And score when in trouble  
With chalk-marks and crosses  
The gains and the losses.  
It was pastime and play  
Or the work of the day,  
When to gamble they met  
On days that were wet.

THERE was a card party one evening at the house of an officer of the horse-guards named Narumov. The long winter night passed unperceived; it was nearly five o'clock when they sat down to supper. The winners ate with great appetite; the others sat looking at their empty plates with troubled thoughts. When champagne was served, the conversation became more animated, and all took part in it.

'What did you do, Surin?' asked the host.

'I lost as usual. I must confess I am most unlucky.'



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I play calmly, I never get excited, nothing disconcerts me, and yet I always lose.'

'And you have never been tempted? You have never staked on the red? Your firmness of character astonishes me.'

'But what do you think of Hermann?' asked one of the guests, pointing to a young engineer. 'From his birth he has never backed a card; and he sits with us until five o'clock in the morning watching our play.'

'Play interests me profoundly,' said Hermann, 'but I have not the means to risk necessities in the hope of gaining superfluities.'

'Hermann is a German: he is prudent and that's the whole secret,' observed Tomski. 'But if there's one person I simply can't understand, it's my grandmother, Countess Anna Fedotovna.'

'How? Why?' exclaimed the guests.

'What I can't understand,' continued Tomski, 'is why my grandmother does not play.'

'Is there anything surprising in an old woman of eighty not playing cards?' asked Narumov.

'You evidently know nothing about her.'

'No! That's true. I don't know anything.'

'Well then, listen. First of all you must know that my grandmother went to Paris some sixty years ago, and was very popular there in the fashionable world. People ran after her to see "*la Vénus Moscovite*." Richelieu courted her, and my grandmother says that he nearly shot himself because of her cruelty! At that time all ladies played faro. One day at court she lost—on credit—to the Duke of Orleans a very large sum. That same night, while she was removing the patches from her face and untying her farthingale, my grandmother told my grandfather of her losses and ordered him to pay them. My late grandfather, as far as I can remember him, was a sort of house-steward to my grandmother. He dreaded her like fire; nevertheless hearing of such terrible losses, he got impatient, brought his accounts, and proved



سزا  
کار  
تکلیف  
to her that in half a year they had run through half a million, and that in Paris they had not got their Moscow or Saratov estates, and positively refused to pay. My grandmother boxed his ears and went to bed alone in token of her displeasure. The next day she sent for him, hoping that the domestic punishment she had inflicted on him would have had the desired effect, but found him immovable. For the first time in her life she deigned to embark on a discussion and explanation with him; she tried to make him ashamed, condescendingly explaining that there are debts—and debts, and that there is a difference between a prince and a carriage-maker. My grandfather, however, rebelled; he persisted in his refusal. It was no, and again no, and nothing would move him. My grandmother did not know what to do. She was very intimate with a remarkable man. You have heard of the Count of Saint Germain, about whom such wonders are related. You know he pretended to be the wandering Jew, and said he had discovered the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone, and other things. He was laughed at and called a charlatan; Casanova in his *Memoirs* says that he was a spy. Notwithstanding the mystery that surrounded him, Saint Germain was very respectable in appearance and very amiable in society. My grandmother still loves him madly and cannot forget him; she gets very cross if anyone speaks disrespectfully of him. Now my grandmother knew that Saint Germain could command very large sums of money. She decided to ask his assistance and wrote a note to him, begging him to come at once to see her. The strange man came immediately, and found her in a terrible state of trouble. She described to him in the very darkest colours the barbarity of her husband, and finished by saying that her only hope lay in his friendship, and kindness. Saint Germain thought awhile: "I could accommodate you with this amount," said he, "but I know you will not be at peace until you have repaid me, and I do not want to cause you



further trouble. There is another way—you can win it back.”

““But, my dear Count,” answered my grandmother, “I have already told you that we have no money.”

““In this case money is not necessary,” said Saint Germain. “I beg you to listen to me.”

“He then unfolded to her a secret, for which everyone of us would be glad to pay a high price.”

The young gamblers became doubly attentive. Tomski lighted his pipe, drew a few whiffs, and continued.

“That same evening my grandmother appeared at Versailles *au jeu de la reine*. The Duke of Orleans kept the bank. My grandmother made some slight apology for having been unable to bring what she owed, invented a little story as excuse, sat down, and began punting against him. She chose three cards; she staked on them in succession and won each time. Thus my grandmother won back all she had lost.”

“Chance,” said one of the guests.

“An idle tale,” observed Hermann.

“It may have been prepared cards,” chimed in a third.

“I think not,” answered Tomski with dignity.

“How is it,” said Narumov, “that you, having a grandmother who can guess three lucky cards in succession, have not yet been able to find out her secret?”

“Yes, the devil only knows,” answered Tomski; “she had four sons, one of whom was my father—and all four desperate gamblers, but she did not confide her secret to one of them, though it would not have been a bad thing for them, or for me either. But this is what my uncle Count Ivan Il’ich related to me, and swore on his honour to the truth of it. The late Chaplitski, who died a beggar, having squandered millions, once in his youth had lost heavily—to Zorich, I think—about three hundred thousand roubles. He was in despair. My grandmother, who was always very strict about young men’s excesses, was somehow very sorry for Chaplitski. She gave him three cards

to stake on, one after another, and made him swear on his honour never to play again after that. Chaplitski appeared at the house of his victor; they sat down to play. Chaplitski staked on the first card fifty thousand and won; he doubled his stake—redoubled it—won everything back, and had something to the good.'

'Hullo, it's time to be getting to bed; it's a quarter to six already.'

Day was indeed already beginning to break.

The young men drained their glasses and separated.

## II

'Il paraît que monsieur est décidément pour les suivantes.'

'Que voulez-vous, madame? Elles sont plus fraîches.'

## SOCIETY TALK

THE old Countess \* \* \*<sup>1</sup> sat in her dressing-room before her mirror, her three maids around her. One had a pot of rouge in her hand, another a box of hairpins, while the third held a high cap with flame-coloured ribbons. The Countess had no traces of beauty left, it had long ago faded, but she retained all the habits of her youth; she strictly adhered to the fashions of the seventies and took as long over her toilet, was as careful about it as she had been sixty years before. Near the window a young lady—her ward—was seated at her embroidery frame.

'How do you do, *grand'maman*? ' said a young officer as he entered the room. '*Bon jour, mademoiselle Lise. Grand'maman, I have a favour to ask you.*'

'What is it, Paul?'

'Allow me to introduce one of my friends to you, and to bring him with me to your ball on Friday.'

<sup>1</sup> The Countess is before called by her Christian name and patronymic, Anna Fedotovna; her surname is represented by these asterisks.



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'Bring him straight to the ball, you can introduce him to me then. Were you last night at ——?'

'Of course. It was very jolly; we danced till five o'clock. How lovely Eletskaia was!'

'Oh, my dear, what do you see in her? She'll never be as lovely as her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna, was. By the by, the Princess Daria Petrovna is getting very old.'

'What do you mean—getting old?' exclaimed Tomski thoughtlessly; 'she died more than seven years ago.'

The young lady looked up and made Tomski a sign. He remembered that the death of her contemporary had been kept a secret from the Countess, and bit his lip. However, the Countess had heard what he said with the greatest indifference, although it was news to her.

'What? so she's dead,' said she, 'and I did not know. We were appointed Maids of Honour at the same time, and when we were presented the Empress . . .'

And for the hundredth time the Countess told her grandson her favourite anecdote.

'Now, Paul,' she said when she had finished it, 'help me to get up. Lisa, dear, where is my snuff-box?'

With her maid's help the Countess went behind the screen to finish dressing. Tomski remained with the young lady.

'Who is it you want to introduce?' asked Lisaveta Ivanovna quietly.

'Narumov, do you know him?'

'No; is he in the army or the civil service?'

'In the army.'

'An engineer?'

'No. He is in the cavalry. But why did you think he was an engineer?'

The young lady laughed, but gave no answer.

'Paul,' cried the Countess from behind the screen, 'send me some new novel, but please not a modern one.'

'What do you mean, *grand'maman* ?'

'I mean not the sort of novel where the hero strangles his father or his mother, and there must not be any drownings either. I am awfully afraid of drowned bodies.'

'There are no such novels now. Don't you want a Russian one ?'

'Are there any Russian novels ? Send me one, dear boy, please send me one.'

'Excuse me, *grand'maman*, I'm in a hurry. Excuse me, Lisaveta Ivanovna ! Why did you think that Narumov is an engineer ?' said Tomski as he went out of the dressing-room.

Lisaveta Ivanovna remained alone. She stopped working and looked out of the window. Very soon a young officer appeared on the other side of the street, round the corner of the next house. Blushes suffused her cheeks, and she began to work again, bending low over her canvass. At that moment the Countess re-entered the room completely dressed.

'Lisanka,' said she, 'order the carriage, and let us go for a drive.'

Lisanka got up from her embroidery frame and began putting her things away.

'What's the matter with you—are you deaf ?' cried the Countess ; 'be quick and order the carriage.'

'I will, directly !' the young lady answered quietly, and she ran into the entrance.

A footman came in and brought the Countess some books, sent by Prince Paul Alexandrovich.

'That's all right ! Thank him,' said the Countess.

'Lisanka, Lisanka, where are you running off to ?'

'I must get ready.'

'You'll have time, my dear ; sit down, open the first volume, and read aloud to me.'

The young lady took the book and read a few lines.

'Louder !' said the Countess. 'What's the matter with you, miss ? Have you lost your voice ? Wait a minute, give me my footstool. Nearer. Now then !'



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Lisaveta read another page or two. The Countess yawned.

'Put down that book,' said she. 'What nonsense it is. Send this book back to Paul and thank him.—Now where's the carriage?'

'The carriage is ready,' said Lisaveta Ivanovna, looking out of the window.

'Why are you not dressed?' asked the Countess; 'one always has to wait for you. It's unbearable, miss.'

Lisaveta ran away to her room. Two minutes had not passed before the Countess began ringing her bell. Three maids ran in at one door, a footman at the other.

'What does this mean? One can never get anyone to come when one wants them. Tell Lisaveta Ivanovna I am waiting for her.'

Lisaveta Ivanovna came in, in her cloak and hat.

'At last, miss,' said the Countess. 'Why, what finery! For whom is all this intended? Whom do you want to captivate? What's the weather like?—I think it is windy.'

'No, not at all, your Excellency! It is quite calm,' answered the footman.

'Whatever you say is wrong. Open the window—I thought so; it is windy! and a very cold wind too. Countermand the carriage! Lisanka, we shall not go out; there was no need to make yourself so fine.'

'And this is my life!' thought Lisaveta Ivanovna.

Poor Lisaveta Ivanovna was a most unhappy creature. 'A stranger's bread is bitter,' says Dante, 'and the steps are steep to another's porch.' Who could better know the bitterness of being dependent than the poor protégée of this famous old woman? Countess \* \* \* had not a bad heart, but she was capricious, like women who have been spoilt by the world, stingy and sunk in cold egotism, like all old people who have been loved in their day and find themselves strangers in the present. She took part in all the functions of the great world; went to all the balls,



where she sat in a corner, powdered and rouged and dressed up in the fashions of past days, like an ugly but necessary ornament of the ballroom. Each of the guests as they arrived came up to her with a low bow in performance of a necessary ceremony, but after this duty had been done nobody took any notice of her. She received the whole world at her house, observed the strictest etiquette, but never recognised anybody. Her numerous menials, who had grown fat and grey in her anteroom and the maids' apartments, did whatever they liked and never ceased to rob the old woman who had one foot in the grave. Lisaveta Ivanovna was the domestic martyr. She had to pour out tea, and was reprimanded for using too much sugar: she had to read novels aloud, and was responsible for all the author's mistakes: she accompanied the Countess on her drives, and was answerable for the weather and the bad roads. She had an appointed salary, but never received it in full; at the same time she had to be dressed as others, that is to say as very few, were dressed. In society she played a most pitiful part. Everybody knew her, but nobody took any notice of her; at balls she only danced when a *vis-à-vis* was required, and the ladies took her arm every time they wanted to go into the dressing-room to repair some part of their finery. She was proud, and felt her position bitterly. She looked around to see how she could escape from it, but the young men, who were calculating in their inconstant vanity, did not condescend to take any notice of her, although Lisaveta Ivanovna was a hundred times prettier than the insolent haughty girls, who were considered eligible matches, around whom they fluttered. How often had she quietly left the dull and brilliant drawing-room, to have a cry in her own poor little room, with its wall-papered screen, its chest of drawers, and its painted bedstead, where a tallow candle burned dimly in its brass candlestick.

One day—this happened two days after the card party described in the beginning of this story, and a



## 10 ALEXANDER SERGEEVICH PUSHKIN

week before the scene on which we have dwelt—one day Lisaveta Ivanovna, sitting as usual near the window at her embroidery frame, happened to look out into the street, and noticed a young engineer officer standing immovable and gazing fixedly at her window. She bent her head down and once more began to work; five minutes later she looked out again—the young officer was standing in the same place. As she was not in the habit of coquetting with passing officers, she ceased to look out of the window, and worked hard for about two hours without lifting her head. Dinner was announced. She got up, began to put away her embroidery frame, and happening to look out of the window again saw the officer. This appeared to her rather strange. After dinner she again went to the window with a feeling of uneasiness—but the officer was no longer there, and she soon forgot him.

Two days later as she left the house with the Countess, and was getting into the carriage, she saw him again. He was standing close to the portal, covering up his face with his beaver collar; his black eyes shone out under his hat. Lisaveta Ivanovna felt frightened, she could not understand why, and sat down in the carriage with unaccountable agitation.

When she returned home, she ran to the window—the officer was standing on the same spot directing his eyes on her; she went away tormented by curiosity, and agitated by a feeling which was quite new to her.

From that time no day passed without the young man's appearing at a certain hour under the windows of their house. Between him and her an informal intercourse was established. As she sat at her place working, she felt his approach, lifted her head, and looked at him each day longer and longer. The young man seemed to be grateful to her for this: with the sharp eyes of youth, she saw how the colour quickly mounted to his pale cheeks each time their eyes met.

. . . After a week she smiled at him.

When Tomski asked permission to introduce his



friend to the Countess, the poor girl's heart began to beat. When she heard that Narumov was not an engineer, she regretted that by indiscreet questions she had divulged her secret to this giddy-headed Tomski.

Hermann was the son of a naturalised German who had left him a small fortune. Being firmly convinced of the necessity of securing his independence, Hermann did not even touch his interest but lived entirely on his salary, not allowing himself the smallest extravagance. As he was reserved and proud, his companions had but few opportunities of laughing at his excessive economy. He had strong passions and a fiery imagination, but firmness of character saved him from the usual extravagances of youth. For instance, though he was at heart a gambler he never touched a card, considering, as he said, that his fortune did not permit him to 'risk necessities in the hope of gaining superfluities'; nevertheless for whole nights he sat near the gaming tables watching with feverish interest every turn of the play.

The story of the three cards affected his imagination strongly, and all night he could not get it out of his mind. 'What if', he thought the next night as he wandered about Petersburg,—'what if the old Countess would reveal her secret to me? Or would tell me the three winning cards? Why shouldn't I try my luck? To get introduced to her, to ingratiate myself in her favour, perhaps even become her lover—but all this will take time. And she is eighty years old: she may die in a week's time—in two days' time! Yes, and even this anecdote—can one believe it? No, economy—moderation—industry! These are my three safe cards that will triple,—nay, seven times increase my capital, and bring me peace and independence!'

Thinking thus he found himself before a house of ancient architecture in one of the chief streets of Petersburg. The street was crowded with carriages. One after another they drove up to the illuminated

porch. Every minute appeared from the carriages, now the shapely foot of a young beauty, now a pair of Hessian boots with rattling spurs or striped stockings and diplomatic shoes. Fur coats and long cloaks went rapidly past the dignified hall-porter. Hermann stopped.

'Whose house is that?' he asked of the baker at the corner of the street.

'Countess \* \* \*s,' answered the baker.

Hermann trembled. The wonderful anecdote again recurred to his memory. He began to walk about before the house thinking of its mistress and her wonderful capacity. It was late before he returned to his own quiet room, it was long before he fell asleep, and when at last sleep mastered him he dreamed of cards, green tables, heaps of bank-notes, and piles of gold pieces. He staked on card after card, doubled his stakes with determination, won all the time, raked the gold towards himself, and thrust the bank-notes into his pocket. It was late when he awoke, and he sighed at the loss of his fantastic wealth. Again he wandered about town, and again found himself before the house of Countess \* \* \*. An indefinable power seemed to draw him to it. He stopped and began to look at the windows. In the corner of one of them he saw a little black-haired head bending over a book or some needlework. The head was lifted. Hermann saw a bright little face and black eyes. That minute decided his fate.

### III

'Vous m'écrivez, mon ange, des lettres de quatre pages plus vite que je ne puis les lire.'

#### FROM A LETTER

LISAVETA IVANOVNA had hardly had time to take off her cloak and hat before the Countess sent for her and again ordered her carriage. They were just about to start; two lackeys had lifted the old woman and



were pushing her through the door, when Lisaveta Ivanovna saw her engineer standing close to the wheel of the carriage; he caught hold of her hand—she had not time to recover from her fright before he had disappeared; a letter remained in her grasp. She hid it in her glove, and during the whole drive heard and saw nothing. The Countess had a habit of asking questions every minute during her drives: 'Who is coming towards us?'—'What is the name of this bridge?'—'What is written on this sign-board?' Lisaveta Ivanovna answered at random and so distractedly during this drive that the Countess got cross.

'What's happened to you, miss? Are you struck dumb? You either don't hear me, or don't understand what I say! Thank God, I speak plainly enough, and have not lost my senses.'

Lisaveta Ivanovna did not hear her. When she arrived home, she ran to her room and took the letter out of her glove; the envelope was not closed. Lisaveta Ivanovna read it. The letter contained a declaration of love: it was tender but respectful, and had been copied word for word from a German novel. As Lisaveta Ivanovna did not read German, she was highly pleased with it.

Nevertheless she felt some perturbation at her acceptance of the letter. It was the first time she had entered into secret and tender relations with a young man. His audacity terrified her. She accused herself of indiscretion, and did not know what course to take: should she cease to sit at the window and by paying no attention to him cool in the young man all wish to pursue her further? Should she return him his letter? Should she answer him coldly and decisively? She had nobody to counsel her, she had no friend or adviser. Lisaveta Ivanovna decided to answer the letter.

She sat down at her writing-table, took pen and paper, and sat thinking. She began several letters, but tore each of them up. Sometimes the expressions

appeared to her too condescending, sometimes too severe. At last she succeeded in writing a few lines with which she was satisfied: 'I am sure,' she wrote, 'that you have honest intentions and that you do not wish to insult me by any thoughtless act; but our acquaintance ought not to begin in this way. I return you your letter, and trust that in future I shall not have cause to complain of unmerited disrespect.'

The next day when she saw Hermann approaching Lisaveta Ivanovna got up from her embroidery frame, went into the drawing-room, opened the window, and trusting to the young officer's quickness threw the letter into the street. Hermann ran forward, picked up the letter and went into a confectioner's shop. Tearing open the seal he found his own letter and Lisaveta Ivanovna's answer. He had expected nothing better and returned home preoccupied with his love affair.

Three days later a little sharp-eyed girl from the milliner's shop brought Lisaveta Ivanovna a letter. Lisaveta Ivanovna opened it with trepidation, fearing a demand for money, but suddenly saw Hermann's handwriting.

'You have made a mistake, my dear child; this letter is not for me.'

'No, it is for you,' answered the girl boldly, not even trying to hide a sly smile; 'have the goodness to read it.'

Lisaveta Ivanovna glanced at the letter. Hermann demanded a rendezvous.

'It can't be for me,' said Lisaveta Ivanovna, terrified at the hastiness of the demand and the means by which it had been conveyed to her; 'this letter is certainly not for me,' and she tore it into small pieces.

'If the letter is not for you, why have you torn it up?' asked the shop-girl; 'I could have returned it to the sender.'

'My good soul,' said Lisaveta Ivanovna, enraged at this remark, 'in future, please, never bring me any



letters, and tell the person who sent you that he ought to be ashamed of himself.'

Hermann was not discouraged. Every day Lisaveta Ivanovna received from him letters sent by one means or another. They were no longer translations from the German. Hermann wrote them inspired by his passion and spoke in a language that was natural to him; in them he expressed the stability of his desires and the disorder of his unbridled imagination. Lisaveta Ivanovna did not think any longer of sending them back, she was intoxicated by them; she began to answer them, and his replies became with each day longer and more tender. At last she threw from the window the following letter:—

'To-night there is a ball at the ——— Embassy. The Countess will be there and will stay there till about two. This is an opportunity for you to see me alone. As soon as the Countess leaves the house, her servants will in all probability run out. At the entrance only the hall-porter will remain, but even he usually goes to his room. Come at half-past eleven. Go straight up the stairs. Should you meet anyone on the stairs ask if the Countess is at home. You will be told that she is not at home, and then there will be nothing for you to do but to go away. But it is more probable that you will meet nobody. All the maids will be sitting together in their room. From the entrance turn to the left, go straight on until you come to the Countess's bedroom. In the bedroom behind the screen you will see two little doors: on the right is a private room into which the Countess never goes, on the left is a passage and a narrow staircase—which leads to my room.'

Hermann trembled like a tiger in expectation of the appointed time. At ten o'clock that night he already stood before the house of the Countess. The weather was abominable: the wind howled; wet snow fell in great flakes, the street lamps shone dimly; the street was deserted. Occasionally an *izvozchik*, with his miserable jade, passed along the street, on the



lookout for a belated fare. Hermann stood there without a greatcoat, but did not notice the wind and snow. At last the Countess's carriage drove up. Hermann saw the lackeys almost carry out the old, bent woman wrapped up in her sable furs; he also saw how she was quickly followed by her companion in a thin mantle with fresh flowers in her hair. The door was banged to. The carriage drove heavily away through the loose snow. The hall-porter shut the door. The windows became dark. Hermann began to walk about before the empty house; he went up to a street-lamp and looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes past eleven. He remained under the lamp gazing intently at the hands of his watch, waiting for the remaining minutes to pass. Exactly at half-past eleven Hermann mounted the Countess's steps and entered the brightly lighted hall. The porter was not there. Hermann ran up the stairs and opened a door into an ante-chamber, where he saw a servant sleeping under the lamp on an old, dirty arm-chair. With light but firm steps Hermann passed him by. The ballroom and the drawing-room were both dark, only dimly lighted by the lamp from the anteroom. Hermann entered the bedroom. A golden lamp glimmered dimly before a small shrine which was filled with old *icons*. The gilding was falling off the sofas and chairs, standing in pathetic symmetry round the walls, which were covered with Chinese wall-paper. The stuff on the furniture and down cushions was old and faded. On the walls hung two portraits painted in Paris by Mme Lebrun. One represented a man of about forty, stout and florid, in a light green uniform with a star on his breast, the other a young beauty with an aquiline nose and hair drawn back from the temples. A rose decorated her powdered hair. In every corner of the room were porcelain shepherdesses, standing clocks made by the celebrated Leroy, small boxes, roulettes, fans, and various other lady's knick-knacks that, along with Montgolfier's balloons and Mesmer's magnetism,



had been invented at the end of the last century. Hermann went behind the screen. A small iron bedstead stood there. On the right was the door leading into the private chamber; on the left another led into the passage. Hermann opened it and saw a narrow winding staircase which led to the room of the poor companion. He turned back and entered the private chamber. Time went slowly on. All was dark around. The clock in the drawing-room struck twelve; in every room, one after another, the clocks struck twelve, and then all was silent again. Hermann leaned against a cold stove. He was calm; his heart beat regularly, like the heart of a man who has decided to do something dangerous but necessary. The clocks struck one, then two, and he heard the distant sound of a carriage. Involuntary excitement seized him. The carriage approached and stopped at the door. He heard the noise of the steps being lowered. There was commotion in the house. Servants ran from all sides, voices were heard, and the house was lighted up. Three old servants ran into the bedroom, and the Countess, barely alive, entered and sank down into a Voltaire arm-chair. Hermann looked through a chink. Lisaveta Ivanovna passed close by him. Hermann heard her hurried steps as she mounted the stairs. In his heart there was something like a sting of remorse, but it soon subsided: he turned to stone.

The Countess, sitting before her mirror, began to undress. The maids removed her cap with its roses, they took her powdered wig off her grey and closely cropped head; there was a rain of hairpins all around her. The yellow dress embroidered with silver fell at her swollen feet. Hermann was the spectator of all the disgusting secrets of her toilet: at last the Countess remained in her nightdress and nightcap. In this garb, more suitable to her age, she appeared less terrible and ugly. Like all old people, the Countess suffered from sleeplessness. When she was undressed she sat down in her Voltaire arm-chair near the window and dismissed her maids. The candles



were carried out, and again the room was lighted only by the *icon-lamp*. The Countess looked yellow as she sat moving her drooping lips and swaying to right and left. In her dim eyes there was an entire absence of thought; looking at her you might have imagined that the swaying of this terrible old woman was not caused by any voluntary movement of her own but by some hidden galvanism.

Suddenly the death-like face changed its expression unaccountably. The lips ceased to move, the eyes regained animation: an unknown man stood before the Countess.

'Don't be afraid—for God's sake don't be afraid,' he said in a clear, low voice. 'I have no intention of doing you any harm; I have come to beg of you a favour.'

The old woman looked at him silently and did not seem to hear him. Hermann thought she was deaf, and bending down to her ear repeated the same words. The old woman was still silent.

'You can make my life happy,' continued Hermann, 'and it will cost you nothing. I know that you can guess three cards in succession.'

Hermann stopped. The Countess seemed to understand what was required of her, and appeared to be searching for words for her reply.

'It was a joke,' she said at last; 'I swear it was a joke.'

'There's no joking about this matter,' cried Hermann angrily, 'remember Chaplitski, whom you assisted to recover his losses.'

The Countess evidently was agitated. Her features denoted a strong mental movement, but she soon sank into her former unconsciousness.

'Can you tell me,' continued Hermann, 'these three sure cards?'

The Countess remained silent. Hermann proceeded:

'For whom are you reserving this secret? For your grandchildren? They are rich already, they do not know the value of money. Your three cards won't

help a young spendthrift. He who does not understand how to keep his father's inheritance, will, in spite of all the Satanic forces, die in poverty just the same. I am no spendthrift, I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be lost by me . . . Well ?'

He stopped, and anxiously awaited her answer, but she remained silent. Hermann fell on his knees.

'If ever your heart has known the feeling of love,' he said : 'if you remember its delights : if you have even once smiled at the cry of a new-born son : if any human feeling has ever throbbed in your breast : I conjure you by every feeling of a wife, a lover, a mother—by everything sacred in life, do not refuse my request ; tell me your secret. What good can it do you now ? . . . Perhaps it is accompanied by a great sin—by the loss of eternal bliss,—by a diabolic contract. . . . Reflect : you are old—you have not long to live ; I am willing to take your sin on my soul. Only tell me your secret. Realise that a man's happiness is in your hands, that not only I, but my children, my grandchildren, and their children, will bless your memory and honour you as a saint.'

Not a word did the old woman answer.

Hermann rose.

'Old witch,' he cried, clenching his teeth, 'then I will force you to answer.' . . .

With these words he drew from his pocket a pistol. At the sight of the pistol the Countess once again showed signs of great agitation. She threw back her head and raised her hand as if to screen herself from the shot, then sank backwards and remained immovable.

'Cease behaving like a child,' Hermann said, taking her hand. 'I ask you for the last time if you will tell me your three cards ? Yes or no ?'

The Countess did not answer. Hermann saw that she was dead.

all no 10482



## IV

7 Mai 18—.

Homme sans mœurs et sans religion.

FROM A LETTER

LISAVETA IVANOVNA sat in her room still wearing her ball finery and plunged in deep thought. When she returned home she hurriedly dismissed the sleepy maid, refusing her proffered services and telling her she would undress herself, and trembling entered her room, where she hoped—and feared—to find Hermann. The first glance she cast round the room showed her that he was not there, and she thanked Providence for the obstacle that had prevented their meeting. She sat down without undressing and thought of all the circumstances that in so short a time had entangled her. Three weeks had not yet passed since, looking out of the window, she had seen the young man for the first time, and she was already corresponding with him, and he had had time to demand a nocturnal rendezvous! She knew his name only because he had signed some of his letters; she had never spoken to him, had never heard his voice, had never heard anything about him—until that evening. It was a strange occurrence! This evening at the ball Tomski, who was sulky because the young Princess Pauline was flirting, but not with him as was usual, and who wanted to prove to her his indifference and to get his revenge, had asked Lisaveta Ivanovna to dance an endless mazurka with him. He chaffed her all the time about her passion for engineer officers, and assured her that he knew more about it than she imagined. Some of his jokes were so successfully directed that several times Lisaveta Ivanovna thought he had discovered her secret.

‘From whom do you know all this?’ she asked laughing.

‘From the friend of the person you know well,’ answered Tomski; ‘from a very remarkable man.’

‘Who is this remarkable man?’

'He is called Hermann.'

Lisaveta did not say a word, but her hands and feet grew cold.

'Hermann,' continued Tomski, 'is a truly romantic person; he has the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles. I think he has on his conscience at the very least three crimes. How pale you are!'

'My head aches.—What did Hermann, or whatever his name is, tell you?'

'Hermann is very displeased with his friend: he says that in his place he would act differently. I can even imagine that Hermann himself has intentions regarding you. In any case he does not listen with indifference to the love-sick exclamations of his friend!'

'But where has he seen me?'

'In church, perhaps, at a fête—God only knows—perhaps in your room, when you were asleep. He would place . . .'

The conversation, which was becoming cruelly interesting to Lisaveta Ivanovna, was interrupted by the approach of three ladies with the question: '*Oubli ou regret?*'

The lady chosen by Tomski was the Princess Pauline. She succeeded in explaining matters to him during the extra round they made of the room and the extra turn they took before her chair. When Tomski returned to his seat he no longer thought of Hermann or of Lisaveta Ivanovna. She wanted very much to renew the interrupted conversation, but the mazurka came to an end, and shortly after the Countess went home.

Tomski's words were nothing more than ordinary ballroom chatter, but they penetrated deep into the soul of the young visionary. The portrait sketched by Tomski corresponded with the one she had drawn for herself, and thanks to the newest novels, this very ordinary young man frightened her but captivated her imagination. She sat with her bare arms crossed and her head, still adorned with flowers, sunk on her open breast. Suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She trembled.



'Where have you been?' she asked in a frightened whisper.

'In the old Countess's bedroom,' answered Hermann. 'I have just come from there. The Countess is dead.'

'My God—what do you mean?'

'I think,' Hermann continued, 'that I am the cause of her death.'

Lisaveta Ivanovna looked at him, and Tomski's words recurred to her memory: 'This man has at least three crimes on his conscience.' Hermann sat down next to her on the window-sill and told her all.

Lisaveta Ivanovna listened to him with terror. So all these passionate letters, these fiery demands, this audacious, obstinate pursuit of her—all this was not love. Money was his soul's craving. It was not she who could allay his desire and make him happy. The poor companion was no more than the blind accomplice of this robber, the murderer of her benefactress. She cried bitterly in her belated torturing repentance. Hermann silently looked at her; his soul was also tormented, but his hard heart was neither moved by the tears of the poor girl nor by the wonderful charm of her sorrow. He did not feel any qualms of conscience at the thought of the dead old woman. Only one thing terrified him—the irreparable loss of the secret he had counted on to enrich himself.

'You are a monster,' said Lisaveta Ivanovna at last.

'I did not desire her death,' answered Hermann. 'My pistol was not loaded.'

They were both silent.

The day began to dawn. Lisaveta Ivanovna extinguished the candle that had almost burnt out. A faint light brightened the room. She wiped her tearful eyes and lifted them towards Hermann. He still sat on the window-sill with folded arms and stern, frowning brow. In this position he had a strong resemblance to Napoleon. This resemblance astonished Lisaveta Ivanovna.

'How are you to get out of the house?' said Lisaveta Ivanovna at last. 'I thought of letting you

out by the secret stair, but that means going through the bedroom, and I am afraid.'

'Tell me how I am to find this secret stair. I shall get away.'

Lisaveta Ivanovna rose, took a key from her pocket, gave it to Hermann, and told him how he could get out. Hermann pressed her cold and unresponsive hand, and kissing her bent head left the room.

He descended the winding stair and once more entered the Countess's bedroom. The corpse of the old woman sat rigid in the chair; her face had a look of profound calm. Hermann stopped before her and looked long in her face as if he wanted to assure himself of the dreadful truth. At last he went into the dressing-room, felt behind the drapery, found the secret door, and troubled by strange feelings, began to descend the dark stair. 'Perhaps down this same stair,' he thought, 'some sixty years ago, from this same bedroom, at this same hour, there had crept a young and happy man, with embroidered kaftan and hair dressed *à l'oiseau royal*, pressing his three-cornered hat to his breast. He has long since rotted in his grave; to-day the heart of his old mistress has ceased to beat.'

At the foot of the stairs Hermann found a door. This he opened with the same key and entered a corridor which led to the street.

## V

'That night the deceased Baroness B \* \* \* appeared to me. She was dressed in white and said to me, "How do you do, Mr Councillor?"'

## SWEDENBORG

THREE days after this fatal night, at nine o'clock in the morning, Hermann went to the ——— monastery, where the funeral service for the dead Countess was to be held. Though he felt no remorse, he could not quite stifle the voice of conscience, which kept repeating to him: 'You are the murderer of this old



woman !' He had little faith but many superstitions. He believed that the deceased Countess might have an evil influence on his life, and decided to go to her funeral to ask her forgiveness.

The church was full. With difficulty Hermann made his way through the crowd of people. The coffin stood on a richly draped catafalque under a velvet canopy. The dead woman was lying there, her hands crossed on her breast, in a lace cap and white satin dress. Her household stood around, the men servants in black kaftans with a band marked with her crest over their shoulders and lighted tapers in their hands ; all the relations were in deep mourning. There were her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Nobody cried ; tears would have been an affectation. The Countess was so old that her death could surprise no one, and her relations had long looked upon her as one who was dead. A young bishop pronounced the funeral oration. In simple but touching words he described the peaceful death of the righteous departed, who for long years had made a quiet and affecting preparation for a Christian ending. 'The Angel of Death has found her,' said the orator, 'vigilant in the thought of good deeds and awaiting the midnight bridegroom.' The service was performed with sad propriety. The relations were the first to go to take leave of the body. Then followed the numberless guests, come to bow before her who had so long been the sharer of their frivolous amusements. After them came all the household. At last an old waiting-woman approached ; she was a contemporary of the departed. Two young girls supported her under the arms. She had not the strength to bow to the ground, and she alone shed a few tears and kissed the hand of her mistress. After her Hermann decided to go up to the coffin ; he bowed to the ground and lay for a few minutes on the cold floor which was covered with fir branches ; after a time he arose, pale as the corpse itself, went up the steps of the catafalque, and bent over the coffin. . . .



At that instant it seemed to him that the corpse looked at him with derision and winked one eye. Hermann stepped back quickly, missed his footing, and fell backwards to the ground. He was lifted up. The same moment Lisaveta Ivanovna was carried out to the porch in a swoon. This episode disturbed for a moment the solemnity of the gloomy function. A low murmur arose among those present, and a thin old gentleman of the Bed-chamber, a near relation of the departed, whispered in the ear of an Englishman standing next to him that the young officer was her natural son; to which the Englishman coldly answered, 'Oh ?'

All day long Hermann was very much upset. He dined at an isolated inn, and contrary to his wont drank deeply, in the hope of allaying his inward emotion. The wine only heated his imagination. When he arrived home he threw himself on his bed without undressing, and slept heavily.

When he awoke it was already night, and the moon shone into his room. He looked at his watch; it was a quarter to three. Sleep had deserted him; he sat down on his bed, and thought of the Countess's funeral.

At that moment somebody looked in at his window and at once went away. Hermann took no notice of this. About a minute later he heard the door open into the anteroom. Hermann thought that his orderly, drunk as usual, had come home from some midnight revel. But he heard an unknown footstep. Someone was moving about quietly, shuffling along in slippers. The door opened, and a woman in a white dress entered the room. Hermann thought it was his old foster-mother and wondered what had brought her at that hour. But the white woman slipping along suddenly appeared before him, and Hermann recognised the Countess.

'I have come to you against my will,' she said in a firm voice; 'but I am ordered to grant your request. Three, seven, and ace, will win for you consecutively,



but only on condition that you do not play more than one card in twenty-four hours, and that in your whole life you never play again. I forgive you my death on condition that you marry my ward Lisaveta Ivanovna.'

With these words she quietly turned, went to the door and disappeared, shuffling along in her slippers. Hermann heard the hall door bang to, and again someone looked in at the window.

It was long before Hermann could compose himself. He went into the next room. His orderly was sleeping on the floor; with difficulty Hermann awoke him. The man was drunk as usual, and Hermann could get nothing out of him. The hall door was locked. Hermann returned to his room, lit a candle and wrote down his vision.

## VI

'*Attendez !*'

'How dare you say *attendez* to me ?'

'Your Excellency, I said *Attendez*, Sir !

Two fixed ideas can no more exist at the same time in the ethical world than two bodies can occupy the same place in the physical world. Three, seven, and ace soon obscured in Hermann's mind the recollection of the dead Countess. Three, seven, and ace never left his thoughts, and always moved upon his lips. If he saw a young girl he would say, 'How graceful she is, just like a three of hearts !' If he were asked what the time was, he would answer 'Five minutes to the seven.' Every corpulent man reminded him of the ace. Three, seven, and ace pursued him in his dreams, taking all sorts of forms ; the three flowered before his eyes in the form of a pompous grandiflora ; the seven appeared before him like a Gothic arch, the ace like a gigantic spider. All his thoughts were concentrated on one object—how he could best profit by the secret that had cost him so much. He began to have thoughts of resigning his commission, and he

wished to travel. He dreamed of making his fortune in the public gaming-houses of Paris. Chance, however, saved him this trouble.

A company of rich gamblers had been formed in Moscow under the presidency of the renowned Chekalinski, who had passed his whole life at the card-table and had made several millions of roubles by accepting his winnings in bills and paying his losses in cash. Long experience had procured for him the confidence of his partners; an open house, a good cook, his amiability and joviality attracted the best society. He arrived in Petersburg. The young men flocked to his house, forsaking the dance for the card-table, and preferring the enticements of faro to the seductions of gallantry. Narumov took Hermann to this house.

They passed through a suite of magnificent rooms, full of obsequious lackeys. All the rooms were crowded with guests. Several generals and privy-councillors were playing whist; young men sat lolling on soft sofas, eating ices and smoking. In the drawing-room at a long table, around which some twenty players were collected, sat the master of the house, keeping the bank and dealing the cards. He was a man of about sixty, of the most venerable appearance. His hair was turning silver grey; his stout, fresh face denoted an affable nature, his shining eyes were animated by a constant smile. Narumov introduced Hermann. Chekalinski shook his hand in a friendly manner, begged him to make himself at home, and continued to turn up the cards.

The deal lasted a long time. There were more than thirty cards on the table. Chekalinski stopped after every two cards to allow the players to arrange their cards, and noted their losses. He listened politely to their demands and still more politely returned any extra stake that had been left by an absent-minded player. At last the deal came to an end. Chekalinski shuffled a pack and prepared to deal again.

'Will you allow me to place a card?' said Hermann.



stretching his arm over a stout man who was punting at that part of the table.

Chekalinski smiled and pleasantly nodded his consent. Narumov with a laugh congratulated Hermann on breaking his long fast, and wished him luck for his opening.

'I stake—' said Hermann, writing a sum in chalk over his card.

'How much?' asked the banker, frowning slightly. 'Excuse me, I can't see it from here.'

'Forty-seven thousand,' answered Hermann.

At these words all heads were instantly turned and all eyes directed towards Hermann. 'He's gone mad,' thought Narumov.

'Allow me to observe,' said Chekalinski with his unalterable smile, 'that your stake is high. Nobody has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five for a single stake.'

'And what of ———' said Hermann. 'Do you accept my card?'

Chekalinski bowed with the same quiet look of acceptance.

'I only wanted to inform you,' said he, 'that being honoured by the confidence of my partners, I can only play for cash. On my part, I am of course quite satisfied that your word is sufficient, but by the rules of the game I must beg you to place money on your card.'

Hermann took from his pocket a banker's draft and handed it to Chekalinski, who cast his eyes over it and placed it on Hermann's card. He began to deal. A nine fell to the right, a three to the left.

'I have won,' said Hermann, showing his card.

A whisper arose among the players. Chekalinski frowned, but a smile instantly appeared on his face.

'Do you wish to receive your winnings?' he asked Hermann.

'If you please.'

Chekalinski drew from his pocket several bank-notes, and squared accounts at once. Hermann received his



money and quitted the table. Narumov could hardly believe his senses. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and left the house.

The next evening he appeared again at Chekalinski's. The master of the house kept the bank. Hermann approached the table; the punters made way for him at once. Chekalinski smiled at him amiably. Hermann waited for a new deal, chose a card, and staked on it his forty-seven thousand and his winnings of the previous night. Chekalinski began to deal the cards. A knave was on the right—a seven on the left.

Hermann turned up his card.

All exclaimed. Chekalinski was evidently perturbed. He counted out ninety-four thousand roubles, and handed them to Hermann, who received them with indifference and at once left the house.

The next night Hermann appeared again at the gaming table. Everyone expected him. The generals and privy-councillors left their whist to watch the extraordinary play, the young officers jumped up from the sofas, all the waiters collected in the drawing-room. Everybody made room for Hermann. The other players did not place their cards, impatiently awaiting the result. Hermann stood at the table alone, preparing to punt against Chekalinski, pale but still smiling. Each of them opened a pack of cards. Chekalinski shuffled. Hermann chose and placed his card, covering it with a whole heap of bank-notes. It was like a duel. All round a deep silence reigned.

Chekalinski began turning up the cards, his hand shook. To the right fell a queen—to the left an ace.

'The ace has won?' said Hermann, and turned up his card.

'Your queen is dead,' Chekalinski said in a caressing tone.

Hermann trembled: it was true. Instead of an ace he held the Queen of Spades. He could not believe his eyes nor understand how he could have drawn such a card.

At that moment it seemed to him that the Queen of



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Spades winked and grinned. He was struck by a strange resemblance.

'The old woman !' he exclaimed in horror.

Chekalinski raked to himself the lost bank-notes. Hermann stood immovable.

Noisy conversation began as he left the table.

'He punted splendidly !' said the gamblers.

Chekalinski again shuffled the cards and the play proceeded.

### CONCLUSION

Hermann lost his senses. He was confined in the Obukhov Hospital in room No. 7. He never answers any questions, but mumbles with great rapidity : 'Three, seven, ace . . . three, seven, queen . . .'

Lisaveta Ivanovna married a very charming young man. He is in some government office, and has a comfortable income ; he is the son of the former manager of the old Countess's affairs. Lisaveta Ivanovna is bringing up one of her poor relations.

Tomski has become a captain, and is married to the Princess Pauline.

2 12 ✓  
2 18 ✓  
—  
5 11 ✓

2 12 ✓  
2 18 ✓  
—  
5 11 ✓

# NIKOLAI GOGOL

1809-52

## CHRISTMAS EVE

THE last day before Christmas was over. The bright winter night set in, stars peeped out, the majestic moon rose in the sky, to give light for good people all through the world, so that everyone should be joyful with the waits who sang carols to the glory of Christ. The frost was harder than in the morning, but it was so calm that the boots creaking in the snow could be heard more than half a verst off. As yet not a single party of lads had appeared under the windows of the cottages, only the moon peeped in stealthily as if to invite the gaily-dressed girls to run out on the creaking snow. A cloud of smoke went up from the chimney of one of the cottages and rose to the sky, and with the smoke a witch flew out riding astride her broom-stick.

If at that moment the assessor from Sorochino had passed that way—driving in a *troïka* with relays of local horses, and wrapped up in his blue, cloth-covered sheep-skin coat, with its black lambskin trimmings and lambskin cap, in the fashion worn by the Uhlans, and holding a devilish, leather-plaited whip in his hand to brisk up his driver with—if he had passed that way, he would certainly have noticed her, as not a single witch in the whole world could ever escape this Sorochino assessor's eye. He knew the exact number of sucking pigs each good-wife's sow farrowed and how much linen she had in her trunk, or how much of his clothing or goods and chattels any roysterer



would pawn at the tavern on a holiday. But the Sorochino assessor did not pass that way, and why should he?—He had enough to do in his own district. In the meantime the witch had flown away, so high that she looked like a little spot in the sky. But wherever the little spot appeared the stars one after another vanished. Soon the witch had collected a whole bagful of them. Only three or four remained shining in the sky. Then suddenly, from the opposite direction, another spot appeared in the heavens; it grew bigger and bigger, and began to get longer, and was soon a spot no more. A short-sighted man, even if he put on his nose the wheel of a commissioner's *britska* instead of his spectacles, could not have seen what it was. In front it looked just like a German,<sup>1</sup> with a sharp snout always turning about and smelling everything that came its way; a snout which terminated, as with our pigs, in a round flat circle like a penny; his legs were so thin that if they had belonged to the Mayor of Yariskov, he would certainly have broken them the first time he danced a *Cossachek*. But from behind he looked like a provincial advocate in his uniform, because he had a tail hanging as long and sharp as the skirts of the modern uniform. Perhaps it was only his goat's beard, and the small horns protruding from his head, and his being no whiter than a chimney-sweep, that proved he was not a German or a provincial advocate but a common devil, who had only one last night to roam about this blessed world and teach sins to good people. To-morrow, with the first sound of the church bells for matins, he will have to run away to his den with his tail between his legs, never daring to look back.

Meanwhile the devil had quietly crept up to the moon and stretched out his hand to catch it; he quickly drew it back, as if he had been burned, sucked his fingers, jigged his legs, and ran to the other side, but again jumped away and drew back his hand. But

<sup>1</sup> The name given to all foreigners.



notwithstanding his failures, the cunning devil did not give in. Running up suddenly, he seized the moon with both hands, and with many grimaces and blowings threw it from one hand to the other, like a peasant who has taken hold of a glowing coal to light his short pipe. At last he hurriedly stuck the moon in his pocket and, as if nothing had happened, ran on further.

In Dikanka nobody heard the devil steal the moon. It is true that the district clerk when he crawled out of the tavern on all fours saw how, for no special reason, the moon was dancing in the heavens, and swore it was so, to everybody in the village, but the members of the commune only shook their heads and laughed at him. Now what induced the devil to risk such an illegal proceeding? This is what it was: he knew that the rich Cossack Chub had been invited by the cantor to a *kutya*<sup>1</sup> to meet the mayor (a relative of the cantor's in a blue coat, who was to drive over from the bishop's choir, and who could take the very lowest bass notes), the Cossack Sverbyguz, and some others. Besides the rice there was to be punch, vodka flavoured with saffron, and all sorts of food. While he was away Chub's daughter, the beauty of the village, would remain alone at home, and the blacksmith, a strong, sturdy young fellow fit for anything, would be sure to come to see her. Now the devil hated this blacksmith more even than Father Kondrat's sermons. In his spare time the blacksmith occupied himself with painting, and was considered the best painter in the whole neighbourhood. Even the commander of the *solnya* of Cossacks, L—ko, who was then still in good health, had invited him to come to Poltava to paint the fence round his house. All the bowls from which the Dikanka Cossacks ate their *borsh*<sup>2</sup> were painted by the blacksmith. He was a God-fearing man and often painted images of saints. In the

<sup>1</sup> A dish of rice with raisins eaten at funerals and on great fast-days in memory of the dead.

<sup>2</sup> Beetroot soup.



church of T—— you can still see his picture of the Evangelist St Luke; but the chief triumph of his art was a picture he had painted on a panel inserted in the wall of the chapel near the porch representing St Peter on the Day of Judgment, his keys in his hand, driving the evil spirits out of hell; the terrified devil was represented wriggling in anticipation of his own destruction, and the former sinners, who had been confined in hell, were beating him and driving him about with whips, or logs of wood, or whatever came to hand. All the time the painter was working at this picture, painting it on a large wooden panel, the devil did what he could to disturb him. He jogged his arm while he was at work, and lifted the ashes out of the furnace in the smithy and scattered them on the picture; but in spite of all the devil could do, the picture was finished, and the panel taken to the church and inserted in the wall near the porch: from that time the devil had vowed vengeance on the blacksmith.

He had only one night left to wander about on earth, but in that night he tried to find some way of wreaking his vengeance on the blacksmith. That was why he had decided to steal the moon, counting on the laziness of old Chub and the difficulty there was to get him to move. It was a long way to the cantor's house, and the road was a country one, that passed by the mill and the churchyard and skirted an abyss. On a moonlight night, perhaps, the delights of punch and of vodka with saffron might have tempted Chub out, but in darkness like this it was unlikely that anybody would be able to entice him away from a warm stove, or make him leave his cottage. The blacksmith, who for a long time had not been on good terms with him, would not venture, for all his strength, to go and see the daughter if the old man were at home.

As soon as the devil had hidden the moon in his pocket it suddenly grew so dark all over the world that not everybody would have ventured abroad even

to the tavern, to say nothing of the cantor's house. The witch shrieked when she found herself in darkness. The devil, riding towards her like a little imp, took her by the arm, and began whispering in her ear what is usually whispered in the ears of the female sex.

How wonderfully things are arranged in this world! those who dwell in it are always trying to imitate and mimic each other. At one time only the judge and the head of the police in Mirgorod went about in winter in fur coats covered with cloth, all the others wore simple sheep-skins: now, even the assessor and the petty officials have ventured to get themselves new fur coats of fine lambskin with cloth coverings. Three years ago the secretary and clerk bought blue Chinese cloth at sixty Kopecks the *arshin*.<sup>1</sup> The sexton ordered himself nankeen cloth knickers and a striped worsted waistcoat for summer wear. In short, everyone tries to imitate those above him. When will people cease from vanity! You can safely wager that many will think it strange the devil should have descended to this too. But the strangest part of it is that he evidently thought himself handsome, while all the time he had such a figure that one was ashamed to look at him. His ugly face was, as Foma Grigorievich says, an abomination of abominations, but all the same he never lost an opportunity of paying court!

And now it became so dark in the sky and all over the earth that it was quite impossible to see what was happening next.

'So, *kum*,<sup>2</sup> you have not yet seen the cantor's new cottage?' said the Cossack Chub, as he came out of his door, to a tall, thin peasant in a short sheep-skin coat. He had a stubbly beard, which showed that for several days it had not been touched by the bit

<sup>1</sup> 28 inches.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship of two people who have stood sponsors for a child, and their relationship to the parents of the child. Also used for friend or gossip.



of broken scythe with which, in lieu of razors, the peasants usually shave themselves. 'There will be a good drink there to-night,' continued Chub with a smirk on his face. 'We must take care not to be too late.'

With that Chub arranged the belt, tightly girdling his long fur coat, pressed his cap firmly on his head, and grasped his whip in his hand. This whip was the terror of all the worrisome dogs. He then looked up and stopped:

'What the devil—? Look, look, Panas!'

'What?' said his *kum*, looking up too.

'It's all very well to say what! There's no moon!'

'What the deuce—? There isn't, it's true.'

'That's just it, there's no moon,' said Chub, with some vexation that his friend should take it so calmly.

'I suppose you don't want the moon?'

'How can I help it?'

'Some devil', continued Chub, wiping his moustache with his glove, 'must needs interfere! May he get never a glass of vodka in the morning, the dog! It's as if it were done to spite us. I sat in my cottage just now looking out of the window—a lovely night, quite light, the snow shining in the moonlight; you could see everything just as by day. We have hardly got out of the door, and it is as dark as pitch. May he break all his teeth on a dry buckwheat crust!'

Chub grumbled and swore for a long time, while he was thinking what had best be done. He was dying to chatter about all sorts of nonsense at the cantor's house, where without any doubt there were already assembled the mayor, the singer with the bass voice, the tar-burner Mikita, who went every two weeks to Poltava to market and could tell such funny stories that all the good people of Mirgorod had to hold their sides with laughter. Chub already saw in his mind's eye the punch standing on the table. All this was very enticing, but the darkness reminded him of the laziness so dear to all Cossacks. How nice it would

be now to lie with his legs curled under him on the stove-bench and smoke his short pipe, and listen half in a doze to the carols and songs of the boys and girls, who would come in groups to sing under the windows! He would certainly have decided to stay at home had he been alone; for two it would not be so dull or so alarming to walk in the dark, and besides he did not want to appear to others cowardly or lazy. He stopped swearing and turned to his friend.

'So, *kum*, there is no moon.'

'No.'

'It certainly is extraordinary! Give me a pinch of snuff. You have very good snuff, *kum*. Where do you get it?'

'Oh very, the devil take it!' said his friend, shutting the snuff-box, which was made of birch-bark with a pattern carved on it. 'It won't make an old hen sneeze.'

'I remember,' continued Chub, 'the innkeeper, old Zuzula (he's dead now), once brought me some snuff from Nezhin. That was snuff! Fine snuff! Well, old friend, what are we to do? It's a very dark night.'

'Well, perhaps it is best to stay at home,' said his *kum*, taking hold of the door-handle.

If his friend had not said this, Chub would most probably have decided to stay at home, but now something seemed to drive him to the opposite course.

'No, my friend, let us go! We can't stop away, we must go.'

He had hardly said it when he regretted his own words. He found it very unpleasant to go out on such a night, but he consoled himself with the thought that it was his own choice and the reverse of what he had been advised to do.

On his friend's face there was not the slightest sign of vexation. He looked like a man for whom it was all one if he stayed at home or went out; he scratched his shoulder with the thick stick he was carrying and looked round. Then the two old friends started on their journey.



Now let us see what the beautiful daughter was doing when she was left alone.

Oksana had hardly attained her seventeenth year before the whole world, on that side of the Dikanka, and on this side of the Dikanka too, was talking about her. All the young fellows unanimously declared that never had there been such a girl before, and in all the village there was not likely to be another; Oksana had heard and was fully conscious of all that was said about her, and was as capricious as any beauty could be. If instead of a peasant's skirt and apron, she had worn a fine long cloak like a lady, she would have driven away all her maids. The lads ran after her in crowds, but at last losing patience, they one by one deserted the capricious beauty and turned to other girls who were less spoilt. It was only the blacksmith who was obstinate and continued paying her court, although she did not treat him in the slightest degree better than all the others. For a long time after her father had left, Oksana continued to array herself and to turn this way and that before a small looking-glass in a tin frame, with all sorts of airs and graces. She could not stop admiring herself.

'What are people thinking about when they say that I am pretty?' she said in careless tones, by way of saying something to herself. 'It's all lies, I'm not at all pretty!'

But the reflection she saw in the mirror of a fresh, animated, almost childlike face, with bright black eyes and an unaccountably pleasant smile that seemed to express her whole soul, proved to her the contrary.

'Are my dark brows and black eyes so pretty,' continued the young beauty, still looking in her mirror, 'that there is not to be found the like of them in the whole world? What is there pretty in this turned-up nose? in these cheeks? in these lips? Who says there is anything beautiful in my black plaits? Oh, they can frighten one of an evening, when they are coiled and coiled round my head like long snakes. Now I can see that I am not at all pretty!'—and then pushing



the mirror a little farther away she cried 'No, I am pretty! O, so pretty! Beautiful! What joy I shall bring to the man whose wife I am going to be! How my husband will admire me! He will never be able to get over his joy! He will kill me with kisses!'

'A wonderful girl!' whispered the blacksmith, who had come in quietly. 'And she is not boastful! For quite an hour she has been looking at herself in her glass and can't tear herself away, and what's more, praises herself aloud!'

'Yes, lads, am I a partner for any of you? Just look at me!' continued the pretty coquette; 'how well I walk! my bodice is embroidered with red silk, and look at the ribbons on my head! All your life you will never see richer gold braid! My father bought me all this so that the very best young man in the world should marry me.' And laughing merrily she turned round and saw the blacksmith.

She gave a little cry, and stopped before him looking quite severe. The blacksmith was disheartened.

It was difficult to understand the expression on the dark-complexioned face of this charming girl—a look of severity through which you could distinguish signs of amusement at the blacksmith's confusion; a hardly perceptible blush of vexation spread over her face. These expressions were so intermixed and so beautiful, that words failed, and the only thing you could do was to kiss her a million times,—yes, that was the best thing to do under the circumstances.

'Why have you come here?' began Oksana. 'Do you want me to drive you out of the house with a shovel? You are all good at coming to us: you find out in a moment when the fathers are not at home. Oh, I know you all! Well, is my trunk ready?'

'It will soon be ready, my sweetheart; after the holidays it will be ready. If you only knew what a labour it is! for two whole nights I have not left the smithy. But then not a single priest's wife will have a trunk the like of it. The iron bands I have made are better than those I used for the *sołnik's taratayka*



when I went to work in Poltava. And how prettily it will be painted! Search the whole neighbourhood on your little white feet, you will not find anything like it. Red and blue flowers all over it. It will shine like fire. Don't be angry with me! Just allow me to talk to you; to look at you!

'Who is forbidding you? Go on—talk and look!'

She sat down on the bench and again looked at herself in her glass, and began to arrange her plaits. She looked at her neck and her new silk-embroidered smock, and a sly expression of self-satisfaction passed over her lips and fresh cheeks and shone out of her eyes.

'Let me sit down next to you too,' said the blacksmith.

'Sit down,' said Oksana, with the same look of satisfaction on her lips and pleasure in her eyes.

'Beautiful, enchanting Oksana, please let me kiss you!' said the emboldened blacksmith, pressing her to him in the hope of snatching a kiss; but Oksana turned away her cheek, which was already at an imperceptible distance from the blacksmith's lips, and pushed him aside. 'What will you want next? You give him a finger and he takes the whole arm! Go away, your hands are harder than iron—yes, and you smell of smoke! I expect you have dirtied me everywhere with your soot.'

Then she again brought the mirror and again began to adorn herself before it.

'She does not love me,' thought the blacksmith despondently. 'For her it's only a game, and here am I standing before her like a fool, and can't take my eyes off her. I could stand before her for ever, and never take my eyes off her for the rest of my life. How beautiful she is! What would I not give to know what is in her heart—whom she loves? No, she has no need of anybody. She admires herself; she tortures me, poor fellow, and I can't see the light for grief. I love her more than any man in the whole world has ever loved, or will ever love.'

'Is it true that your mother is a witch?' said Oksana laughing; and the blacksmith felt that everything within him laughed with her. Her laughter seemed at once to re-echo in his heart and his gently throbbing veins, and at the same time he was put out that he had not the power to press kisses all over her sweet, smiling face.

'What is my mother to me? You are my mother, my father, and all that is dear to me in the world. If the Tsar summoned me and said "Blacksmith Vakula, ask me for the most precious thing in my kingdom. I will give you whatever you ask. I will order a golden smithy to be made for you and you shall forge with a silver hammer"; I would answer the Tsar, "I want neither precious stones nor a golden smithy, nor the whole of your kingdom: I only ask you to give me my beloved Oksana."'

'So that's the sort of fellow you are! But take care, my father is no fool! See if he does not marry your mother,' said Oksana, smiling slyly. 'How is it the girls don't come? What does it mean? We ought to have started the carols long ago; I am getting bored.'

'Never mind them, my beauty.'

'That's all very well! The lads are sure to come with them, and then the fun will begin. I can just imagine the stories they'll tell.'

'You enjoy being with them?'

'It's merrier than being with you. Ah, somebody's knocking, it must be the girls and boys.'

'Why should I wait any longer,' said the blacksmith to himself; 'she is laughing at me. I am just about as dear to her as a rusty horse-shoe. If so, why should I let anyone else laugh at me as well? Let me only be sure whom she likes more than me—I'll teach him . . .'

The knocking at the door grew louder, and a voice that sounded sharp in the frost called out 'Open the door' and disturbed his thoughts.

'Wait a moment. I will open the door,' said the



blacksmith, and went out into the passage fully intending in his irritation to knock down the first man he met.

The frost increased, and up above it got so cold that the devil jumped from one hoof to the other and breathed on his fists in an attempt to warm his freezing hands a little. It is not surprising that anyone should feel cold who had been knocking about in Hell all day long, where, as everybody knows, it is not as cold as the winter here, and where, with a cap on his head, he had stood like a real cook before a furnace roasting sinners with the same pleasure that old women feel when frying sausages for Christmas.

The witch also felt the cold, though she was warmly dressed; she therefore lifted up her arms, extended a leg, as one does when skating, and without moving a muscle slid down the air, as if it had been an ice-hill, straight into the chimney.

The devil followed her in the same way; and because he was a faster animal than any dandy in silk stockings, it is not surprising that at the very entrance to the chimney he alighted on his sweetheart's neck, and they found themselves together in the capacious oven, surrounded by the pots and pans.

The witch moved aside the oven-door to see if her son Vakula had not invited some guests to the cottage; but when she saw there was nobody in the room, only some sacks lying in the middle of the cottage, she crawled out of the oven, threw off her long sheep-skin coat, and arranged her dress, and nobody would have known that a minute before she had been riding on a broom-stick.

Vakula's mother was only about forty years old. She was neither pretty nor ugly: it is difficult to be pretty at that age. However, she understood how to win some of the most sedate Cossacks (who, it may not be amiss to mention, by the way, were not much in need of beauty). Even the mayor came to see her, and the cantor, Ossip Nikiforovich (of course when his



wife was not at home), and the Cossack Korin Chub, and the Cossack Kasian Sverbyguz. To her honour be it said, she arranged her affairs so well that not one of them thought for a moment that he had a rival. Whenever a pious peasant or a nobleman, as the Cossacks called themselves, dressed in his long coat with a cape, went to church on a Sunday or, if the weather was bad, to the tavern, how could he resist going to see Solokha, to eat some of her rich curd cakes with sour cream, and have a chat with the talkative and amiable mistress of the house? To that end the noblemen went a long way round to get to the tavern, and called it—dropping in on the way! When Solokha went to church on Holy Days, dressed in a bright petticoat, a cotton apron, and a blue skirt trimmed with gold braid, and took her place close to the right side of the chancel, you may be sure that the cantor would cough and wink involuntarily in that direction; the mayor would stroke his moustache, thrust his locks of grey hair behind his ear, and say to his neighbour, 'Ah, what a fine woman! A devil of a woman!' Solokha bowed to every one, and each of them thought she only bowed to him. But anyone who liked to occupy himself with other people's affairs would have noticed that Solokha was specially affable with the Cossack Chub. Chub was a widower. Eight stacks of corn always stood before his cottage. Two pair of strong oxen always put their heads out of the stable that looked on the street and lowed with envy at their passing friend, a cow, or their uncle, the fat bull. The bearded goat always got on the top of the roof and there bleated, in sharp tones like the village policeman, and teased the turkeys that strutted about the yard, but he would turn away when he saw his enemies, the village boys, who scoffed at his beard. In Chub's trunks there was much linen, many caftans and old-fashioned, gold-braided cloaks; his late wife had loved finery. In his kitchen-garden, besides poppies, cabbages, and sunflowers, every year he had sowed two plots of tobacco. Solokha thought that it



would not be bad to join all this to her own possessions, and she already settled in her mind how she would put things in order as soon as she got them into her hands—which made her doubly amiable to old Chub. In order to prevent her son Vakula from making up to the daughter and getting the property into his hands, in which case he would certainly have prevented her from meddling with a single thing, she had recourse to the usual method of all forty-year-old flirts—tried as often as she could to make Chub quarrel with the blacksmith. It may have been this very cunning and shrewdness of hers that caused the village gossips to whisper here and there, especially when they had had a drop too much at some merry-making, that Solokha must be a witch; that Kizyakolupenko, a village lad, had seen she had a tail no bigger than a woman's distaff; that the Thursday before last she had run across the road in the shape of a black cat; that one day a pig had run up to the priest's wife, crowed like a cock, put Father Kondrat's cap on its head, and ran away again. Once, when the old women were talking about this, it happened that a cowherd Tymish Korostiav came up. He did not fail to relate how one day last summer, just before the feast of St Peter, when he was lying at rest in the cowshed with a heap of straw under his head, he had seen with his own eyes a witch with flowing hair and nothing on but a shift milking the cows. He was quite unable to move, so bewitched was he, and she had smeared his lips with something so nasty that all next day he had been obliged to spit. This, however, is somewhat doubtful, as it is only the Sorochino assessor who can see witches. All the eminent Cossacks only shook their heads when they heard these stories. 'Nonsense, old wives' tales!' was their usual answer.

As soon as she had crept out of the oven and recovered herself, Solokha began to clear up and put everything in its place, like a good housewife; but she did not touch the sacks: 'Vakula has brought them in, he may put them away.' Just as the devil came



dowa the chimney he had accidentally turned round and seen Chub walking arm in arm with his friend, some way from his cottage. In the twinkling of an eye he flew out of the chimney again, ran before them on the road, and began to rake up the frozen snow from all sides. A snow-storm began. The air grew white. The snow drifted backwards and forwards, and threatened to bung up the eyes, mouths, and ears of the two pedestrians. The devil flew back to the chimney firmly convinced that Chub and his friend would return home, where he would find the blacksmith and would give him such a drubbing as would for many a long day prevent his taking up his brush to paint offensive caricatures.

Indeed, the snow-storm had hardly begun and the wind scarcely had time to blow cuttingly in his eyes before Chub regretted having come out, and pressing his cap tightly on his head he showered a string of curses on himself, on the devil, and on his friend. This anger was feigned. Chub was very glad that the snowstorm had begun. To the cantor's house was eight times as far as they had come. The pedestrians turned back. The wind now blew at their backs, but they could see nothing through the drifting snow.

'Wait a minute, *kum*,' said Chub stopping, after having walked a short way; 'I think we are going in the wrong direction. I can't see a single cottage. What a snow-storm! Come, old fellow, just turn a little to the side and see if you can't find the road, and in the meantime I'll look about here. What fiend was it forced us to go out in such a snow-storm? Don't forget to call out when you find the road. Oh, what a pile of snow Satan has thrown in my eyes!'

But no road could be seen. The *kum* in his high boots had gone a little to the side, and after wandering about backwards and forwards he at last found himself at the tavern. This discovery delighted him so much that he forgot everything else, and shaking off the snow went into the passage and thought no



more of Chub, who was still outside. Chub, in the meantime, thought that he had found the road. He shouted at the top of his voice, but finding that his friend did not answer, decided to go on alone. A little farther on he saw his own cottage. Snow-drifts lay all around it, and on the roof too. He began to knock at the door with his numbed hands, and to call out in a commanding voice to his daughter to open the door.

‘What do you want here?’ said the blacksmith angrily, coming to the door.

Chub, recognizing the voice of the blacksmith, stepped back. ‘Eh, what, this is not my cottage,’ he said to himself; ‘the blacksmith would not be in my cottage. But, on the other hand, if you look at it properly, it clearly is not the blacksmith’s. Whose cottage can it be?—There, I have it. It must be lame Levchenko’s, who lately married a young wife. His is the only one like mine. I thought it was a little strange that I had got home so soon, but Levchenko is now sitting at the cantor’s, I know. Why is the blacksmith here? Eh, he, he, he! he’s after the young wife. So, so! Good! Now I understand!’

‘Who are you, and why are you hanging about the door?’ said the blacksmith more angrily than at first and coming nearer.

‘No, I won’t tell him who I am,’ thought Chub; ‘what’s the use? he may thrash me, the damned monster;’ and trying to change his voice, he answered, ‘It’s only I, an honest man, who wanted to amuse you a little by singing carols under your window.’

‘Go to the devil with your carols,’ cried Vakula in a rage. ‘What are you standing there for? Get off with you this instant.’

Chub had already formed this prudent intention, but he was vexed at having to obey the blacksmith’s orders. It seemed as if some evil spirit was pulling at his arm and forcing him to say something despite

himself. 'What are you shouting like that for?' said he in the same feigned voice. 'I want to sing carols, that's all!'

'Oh! I see you do not understand words!' and hard upon this remark Chub suddenly felt a most painful blow on the shoulder.

'I see you want to fight in earnest,' said Chub, drawing back.

'Get along with you, get along,' cried the blacksmith, giving him another knock.

'What do you mean?' said Chub in a voice that expressed pain, vexation, and timidity. 'I see you are fighting in earnest and hitting hard.'

'Get out, go away!' cried the blacksmith, slamming the door.

'Just look how brave we are!' said Chub, now that he was alone in the street, 'just have a try; come on! See what he's like! He's a big bully. You think I can't get the law of you? No, my fine fellow; I'll go to law, I'll go straight to the commissioner. You'll hear some more of me. What do I care if you are a blacksmith and a painter? I must have a look at my back and shoulder; I should think they were black and blue. He hits hard, this devil's son. It's a pity it's so cold and I don't want to throw off my sheep-skin.—Wait a minute, you dog of a blacksmith, may the devil smash you up and your smithy too; I'll make you dance! Look here, you gay young spark!—Eh, but he's not at home now! Solokha will be alone!—Hm! It's not far from here—shall I go? At this hour nobody will catch us,—perhaps it might even be possible. . . . Oh, oh, how that damned blacksmith has hurt me!'

And, rubbing his back, Chub went in the opposite direction. Thoughts of the pleasure that awaited him at his interview with Solokha made his pains more bearable, and he did not even notice the frost that crackled on all sides in the village streets nor the deafening shriek of the gale. From time to time his face wore a half-smiling expression in spite of the snow-



storm, which, quicker than any barber, covered his beard and moustache with snow that looked like a lather and tyrannically held its victim by the nose. If the snow had not been driving from all sides and obliterating everything before one's eyes, one could have seen Chub all this time now stopping to rub his back and complain: 'That damned blacksmith, how he did hurt me!' and now beginning to trudge along again.

When the agile dandy with the tail and goat's beard flew out of the chimney and then flew in again, the pouch hanging from a strap at his side, into which he had stuck the stolen moon, accidentally caught on something in the oven and came open; the moon, taking advantage of this opportunity, flew out of the chimney of Solokha's cottage and mounted swiftly into the sky. The night was bright once more, and it seemed as if the snow-storm had never been. The snow looked like a broad silver field dotted with crystal stars. The frost seemed less severe. Crowds of lads and lasses with bags appeared on all sides. Songs were heard, and there was hardly a cottage near which groups of waits did not assemble.

The moon shone gloriously. It is difficult to describe how delightful it is to wander about on such a night with a jolly party of girls and lads laughing and singing, and ready for any joke or fun that the smiling radiance of the night may inspire. You are warm in your thick sheep-skin; the frost only makes your cheeks burn brighter and the devil from behind seems to egg you on to all sorts of mischief.

A crowd of girls with bags ran into Chub's cottage and surrounded Oksana. Exclamations, gay laughter, all sorts of stories, deafened the blacksmith. Everyone spoke at once and hastened to tell their news to the village beauty. They emptied their bags and boasted about all the smoked meats, sausages, and curd cakes they had won by their singing—already a good number. Oksana looked pleased and happy, and

chatted and laughed all the time first with one then with another of the girls.

But the blacksmith—with what envy and vexation he looked on all this gaiety! For once he cursed the waits, though there had been a time when he had delighted in them.

‘Eh! Odarka,’ said the merry beauty, turning to one of the girls, ‘you have got on new shoes. What lovely ones, all worked with gold! You are a lucky girl, Odarka, to have a man who buys you everything you want. I have no one who would give me such beautiful shoes.’

‘Don’t grieve, my enchanting Oksana,’ said the blacksmith; ‘I will get you shoes better than most ladies wear.’

‘You!’ said Oksana, glancing at him arrogantly. ‘We shall see where you will get shoes I would consent to put on my feet—unless you bring me the shoes the Tsaritsa wears!’

‘Just fancy what things she does want!’ cried the laughing girls.

‘Yes!’ continued the proud beauty, ‘all of you witness: I declare that if the blacksmith Vakula brings me the very shoes the Tsaritsa wears I give him my word to marry him that very hour.’

The girls led the capricious beauty away with them.

‘Laugh, yes, laugh,’ said the blacksmith, following them out, ‘I laugh at myself! I can’t understand what has become of my senses! She does not love me—well, let her be. Is there only one Oksana in the world? Thank God! there are many other pretty girls besides her in the village. What’s Oksana worth? she’ll never make a good housewife—she only thinks of dress. It’s about time I stopped playing the fool.’

But at the very moment the blacksmith was trying to be resolute some evil spirit brought to his mind the laughing face of Oksana, saying mockingly, ‘Blacksmith, get me the Tsaritsa’s shoes and I will marry you!’ He became troubled and he could think of nothing but Oksana.



The parties of waits hurried from street to street, the girls going one way, the lads another, but the blacksmith went along, seeing nothing and taking no part in the gaiety, though at one time he had liked it more than anyone.

In the meantime the devil began seriously to make love to Solokha. He kissed her hand with the sort of grimaces the assessor made when he talked to the priest's wife, put his hand to his heart, sighed, and declared that if she would not consent to return his passion and reward him in the usual way, he was capable of anything: he would throw himself into the river, and send his soul straight to hell. Solokha was not so cruel, and the devil knew the person he had to deal with. She loved to have a crowd dangling after her and was seldom without company. This evening she had expected to be alone, as all the important people of the village had been invited to a feast at the cantor's. However, it all turned out quite differently. The devil was just pressing his proposals, when a knock was heard at the door, and the voice of the burly mayor. Solokha ran to open it, and the agile devil hid in one of the sacks.

The mayor shook the snow off his coat, accepted a cup of vodka from Solokha's hand and told her that he had not gone to the cantor's because of the snow-storm; so seeing a light in her window, he had turned in with the intention of passing the evening with her.

He had hardly had time to say this, when there was another knock at the door, and the voice of the cantor was heard—'Hide me somewhere,' whispered the mayor, 'I don't want to meet the cantor just now.'

Solokha thought for a long time before she could fix on a place to hide a man so stout as the mayor; at last she chose the very largest sack of coal and emptied the coal into a tub, and the burly mayor, head, moustache, cap with ear-flaps, and all, got into the sack.

The cantor came in groaning and rubbing his hands. He said that nobody had arrived, and that on the whole he was heartily pleased to be able to have a little chat with her; he had not been frightened by the snow-storm. He came nearer to her; coughed, smiled, touched her bare, plump arm with his long fingers, and said in a sly, self-satisfied manner, 'What is this, magnificent Solokha?' and having said it stepped back.

'What do you mean? That's my arm, Ossip Nikiforovich,' answered Solokha.

'Hm, your arm. He, he, he!' said the cantor, highly satisfied with the first step he had taken, and he began to walk about the room.

'And what is this, dearest Solokha?' said he with the same self-satisfied air, again approaching her and touching her neck lightly with his hand and then again retreating.

'As if you can't see, Ossip Nikiforovich,' answered Solokha; 'that's my neck, with a necklace round it.'

'Hm, a necklace round your neck! He, he, he!' said the cantor, and he again began to walk about rubbing his hands.

'And what is this, incomparable Solokha?'—It is unknown what the voluptuous cantor would now have touched with his long fingers, for at that moment there was another knock at the door and the voice of the Cossack Chub was heard outside.

'O Lord, a visitor,' exclaimed the frightened cantor. 'What will happen if they find a person of my position here? It will get to the ears of Father Kondrat.'

But it was really something quite different that he was afraid of—that his better half might get to know he had been here. With her heavy hand she had already managed to make his thick plait quite a thin one. 'For God's sake, virtuous Solokha,' he said, shaking all over, 'your goodness, as St Luke says in chap—chapter thir—thirteen.—Knocking again, by God, knocking again! For goodness' sake hide me somewhere!'



Solokha emptied the coal out of another sack into the tub, and the not too robust body of the secretary easily slipped in and sat down on the bottom, so that above him there was room for at least half a sack of coal.

'How do you do, Solokha,' said Chub, coming into the cottage. 'You did not expect me, eh? did you now? Perhaps I am disturbing you?' continued Chub, and the merry and important expression of his face showed that his slowly-working brain was trying to prepare some cunning and pointed joke. 'Perhaps you were entertaining yourself with someone? Perhaps you have already hidden somebody, eh?' Delighted with his own remark, Chub laughed and inwardly triumphed because he alone enjoyed Solokha's good favours. 'Come, Solokha, give us a glass of vodka. I think my throat is frozen with this damned cold. God only knows why He sent us such weather, just on Christmas Eve too. It pinches you so, Solokha, you hear, it just pinches you—my hands are quite numb: I can't unbutton my sheep-skin! When the wind caught me——'

'Open the door!' shouted a voice from without, accompanying the shout with many knocks.

'Somebody's knocking,' said Chub, and he stopped short——

'Open the door!' shouted some one louder than before.

'It's the blacksmith,' exclaimed Chub, seizing his cap. 'Listen, Solokha, hide me anywhere you like. Nothing in the world would induce me to show myself to this damned abortion. May he get lumps the size of hay-ricks, this son of a devil, under each of his eyes!'

Solokha was so frightened that she lost her head, and ran about not knowing where she could hide him; quite forgetting everything, she made a sign to Chub to get into the sack where the cantor was already hiding. The poor cantor was afraid to give a sign of his presence by the slightest cough or smallest

grunt of pain, when the heavy peasant sat down almost on his head and placed his frozen boots at each side of his temples.

The blacksmith entered the cottage without either taking his cap off or saying a word, and almost fell down on a bench. It was evident he was in an extremely bad humour.

At the very moment that Solokha shut the door after him, some one knocked again. It was the Cossack Sverbyguz. He could not be hidden in a sack, for there were no more sacks to be found. He was heavier even than the mayor, and taller than Chub's old friend, so Solokha took him into the garden to hear all that he had to say to her.

The blacksmith looked absent-mindedly round his cottage, and listened to the distant sounds of carols that reached him from different parts of the village; at last his eyes fell on the sacks. 'Why are these sacks lying here? They ought to have been taken away long ago. This silly infatuation has quite turned my head. To-morrow is a holiday and the cottage is full of all sorts of rubbish. I'd better take them to the smithy!'

Then the blacksmith sat down by the huge sacks, tied them up tightly, and was preparing to carry them out, but it was evident that his thoughts were wandering. God only knows where, or else he would have heard Chub squeak when his hair was caught by the cord that tied the sack, or the burly mayor's somewhat violent hiccups.

'Is it possible that I can't get this worthless Oksana out of my thoughts?' said the blacksmith. 'I don't want to think of her; and yet I am always thinking only of her, almost as if on purpose. Why do thoughts get into one's head against one's will?—The devil! these sacks seem heavier than they were! Something besides coal must have been put into them.—What a fool I am! I forgot that everything seems heavier to me now. Formerly I could bend and unbend with one hand a five-kopeck copper piece or an iron



horse-shoe, and now even a sack of coal is too heavy for me. Soon the wind will blow me over! No,' he cried, taking heart again. 'What an old woman I am! I won't give anyone the laugh of me! Even if there were ten sacks like this, I would lift the lot,' and he stoutly lifted the sacks on his shoulders, though two strong men would not have been able to carry them. 'I had better take this one too,' said he, picking up a small sack, at the bottom of which the devil was curled up: 'I think I put my tools in it,' and with these words he went out of the cottage whistling an air:

'No wife shall ever trouble me . . .'

Louder and louder sounded the songs and laughter and shouts of jollity in the village street. The crowds of young people wandering about were increased by others that had come from neighbouring villages. The sharp air made the lads wild, and they played all sorts of pranks. From time to time a party of waits sang some gay song, composed by a young Cossack on the spur of the moment; or else some one in the crowd would sing instead of a carol a beggar's song at the top of his voice:

'Good folk, for God's sake  
Give us a curd cake,  
A sausage, some rice,  
Or bun rich with spice.'

Laughter greeted the poet. The small cottage windows were opened, and wrinkled hands of old women, who alone with the aged gaffers remained indoors, held out here a sausage, there a piece of cake. The boys and girls scrambled to catch the prizes in their sacks. In one place a party of lads that had assembled from all sides surrounded a group of girls; then there was a din, laughter and all manner of shrieking: some pelted them with snowballs, others tried to get hold of the bags with all the goodies that



had been collected. At another place the girls had caught one of the boys, tripped him up with their feet, and sent him sprawling with his bag in the snow. It looked as if they intended to amuse themselves all night long, and as if to encourage them it was a beautiful night and had become warmer. The light of the moon seemed whiter from the brilliancy of the snow.

The blacksmith stopped with the sacks on his back. He fancied he heard the voice of Oksana and her gay laugh proceeding from one of the groups of girls. All his veins throbbed; he threw down the sacks with such violence that the cantor at the bottom groaned with pain from the bump and the mayor hiccupped loudly. Vakula joined a party of lads who were following the crowd of girls in which he fancied he had heard Oksana's voice.

'That's she! She is standing there like a Tsaritsa with her shining black eyes! A handsome lad is telling her something—be amusing, for she is laughing—but then she is always laughing,' and without knowing how he did it he managed to squeeze through the crowd of lads and got up to her.

'Ah! Vakula, is that you? How do you do?' said the beauty with the same smile that had almost driven Vakula mad. 'Well, have you earned much by your carols?—but what a small bag you have! Have you got me the shoes that have been worn by the Tsaritsa? Get me those shoes and I'll marry you at once.' And laughing gaily she ran away with the other girls.

As if glued to the ground the smith stood immovable. 'No, I can't bear it any longer; I have no strength left,' said he at last. 'Good God, why is she so devilishly beautiful? Her eyes, every word she says, burn—every part of her burns me. I have no strength to resist her.—It's time to put an end to it all. My soul will be lost!—I will go and drown myself in one of the holes cut in the ice, and there will be an end of me!'



Then with a decided step he followed the group of girls, caught them up, and walking alongside of Oksana said to her in a firm voice: 'Good-bye, Oksana! Look for another bridegroom. Make a fool of whomsoever you like—you will not see me again in this world.'

The beauty seemed surprised, and wanted to say something, but Vakula only waved his hand and ran away.

'Where are you off to?' the lads cried after him as he ran away.

'Good-bye, brothers!' cried the blacksmith in answer; 'God grant that we may meet in the next world, in this world we shall never again walk together. Good-bye, don't think badly of me. Ask Father Kondrat to say a Mass for my sinful soul. Sinner that I am, I have let worldly affairs prevent my painting the icons of the wonder-worker and the Holy Mother of God! All my possessions, which will be found in my trunk, I leave to the Church. Good-bye!'

When he had said this the blacksmith again started running with the sack on his back.

'He has gone mad,' said the lads.

'A lost soul!' murmured a pious old woman who was passing by. 'I must go and let people know that the blacksmith has hanged himself.'

After running through several streets, Vakula stopped to take breath. 'After all, where am I running to?' thought he, 'as if everything were lost. I will try one thing more. I will go to the Cossack from beyond the rapids, Big-Bellied Patzuk. They say he knows all the devils, and can do anything he wants. I will go to him, for my soul I shall have to lose in any case!'

At this moment the devil, who had been lying at the bottom of the bag quite motionless, jumped for joy; but the blacksmith, thinking that he had touched the bag accidentally with his hand and had caused the movement, only gave it a knock with his sturdy fist,

and shaking it on his shoulders proceeded on his way to Big-Bellied Patzuk's.

This Big-Bellied Patzuk had formerly been one of the Cossacks who live beyond the rapids of the Dnieper, but nobody knew if he had been turned out by them or if he had run away of his own accord. It was a long time, perhaps ten years or maybe fifteen, since he had come to Dikanka. When he first arrived he lived like a real Cossack from beyond the rapids: did no work, slept three-quarters of the day, ate like six mowers, and drank nearly three gallons at a sitting; however, he had room for it all, notwithstanding his short stature, for he was wide enough in girth. The baggy trousers he wore were so broad that however large the steps he took, his legs never showed, and he looked like a wine barrel moving along the street. Probably this had caused the nickname 'Big-Bellied' to be given him. A few weeks after his arrival in the village, everybody knew that he was a wizard. If anyone fell ill, Patzuk was sent for at once, and Patzuk had only to whisper a few words for the ailment to be removed as if by magic. If a hungry nobleman choked with a fish-bone, Patzuk knew how to give him such a skilful blow on the back that the bone went the way it ought to go without doing any injury to the lordly throat. Latterly he was seldom seen anywhere. The reason of this was perhaps laziness, or perhaps it was that with each year it became more and more difficult for him to pass through a doorway. Then the villagers had to go to him if they required his assistance.

The blacksmith, not without some trepidation, opened the door and found Patzuk sitting on the floor like a Turk, with a little barrel before him, on which a soup-tureen full of dumplings was standing. This soup-tureen was purposely placed in such a way that it was on a level with his mouth. Without moving a finger, simply by a slight bend of the head, he was able to suck up the liquid and, from time to time, seize one of the dumplings with his teeth.



'This fellow is lazier even than Chub,' thought the blacksmith. 'Chub does at least eat with a spoon, but this man won't lift a finger.'

Patzuk was so much occupied with his dumplings that he did not so much as notice the blacksmith's entrance. As soon as the latter had crossed the threshold, he made a very low bow.

'I have come to ask a favour of you, Patzuk,' said Vakula, bowing again.

Fat Patzuk raised his head for a moment and then began again sucking up the dumplings.

'You are, people say—if you will excuse me,—' said the blacksmith, at last plucking up courage,—'I do not mean it to offend you,—they say you are in some way related to the devil.'

Vakula felt frightened when he had said these words, thinking he had been too straightforward, and scarcely softened his hard words sufficiently, and expecting Patzuk to seize the barrel and soup-tureen and hurl them at his head. He stepped a little aside, and raised his hand to guard his face from the hot soup and dumplings. But Patzuk only looked up, and once more began eating his dumplings.

The blacksmith, feeling encouraged, decided to continue: 'I have come to you, Patzuk—may God grant you all worldly goods in plenty and bread in proportion—' (The blacksmith was able at times to introduce modern expressions in his talk. He had learned them during his stay in Poltava, while painting the *sotnik's* wooden fence.) 'I am a lost sinner! Nothing in the world can save me, come what may! I am driven to ask assistance of the devil. Well, Patzuk,' said the blacksmith, seeing that the other remained silent, 'what am I to do?'

'If you want the devil, go to the devil,' said Patzuk, and continued to stow away the dumplings.

'That is why I have come to you,' answered the blacksmith with a bow. 'I thought no one in the world would know the way to him as well as you do.'

Patzuk did not say a word but finished the dumplings.

'Do me a favour; you're a kind man—don't refuse me,' continued the blacksmith; 'pork, sausage, buck-wheat flour,—well, linen, millet, or anything else, if you require it—as usual among kind people—I will not grudge you. Only tell me how I am to set about finding the way to the devil—so to speak?'

'He who has the devil on his shoulders has not far to go,' Patzuk said calmly without changing his position.

Vakula stared at him as if he expected to find the explanation written on his forehead. 'What is he saying?' his expression seemed silently to ask; and his half-open mouth was ready to swallow the first word he might hear like a dumpling.

But Patzuk remained silent.

Vakula saw that Patzuk now had before him neither a barrel nor dumplings, but in their place two wooden bowls were standing on the floor, one full of little curd puddings and the other of sour cream. His thoughts and eyes were involuntarily fixed on this food. 'Let us see,' said he to himself, 'how Patzuk will eat the curd puddings. He will probably not want to bend down and suck them in as he did the dumplings, and he certainly would not even be able to, for curd puddings must first of all be dipped in sour cream.'

He had hardly had time to think this when he saw Patzuk open his mouth and look at the curd puddings, and then he opened his mouth still wider. At that moment a curd pudding sprang out of the bowl, jumped into the sour cream, turned over, and then rose in the air, alighting in Patzuk's open mouth. Patzuk ate it and again opened his mouth, and another curd pudding went the same way. Patzuk only gave himself the trouble of chewing and swallowing.

'Dear me, how wonderful!' thought the blacksmith, open-mouthed with astonishment, and at the same moment he noticed that a curd pudding tried to jump into his mouth too, and had already smeared his lips with sour cream. Pushing the pudding away and wiping his lips, he thought of what wonders there are



in the world, and to what wisdom a man can attain, by the aid of the powers of evil; the blacksmith felt sure that only Patzuk could help him.

'I must bow to him again, and beg him to explain more fully . . . But, what the devil—? To-day is Christmas Eve, a fast day, and he is eating curd puddings—they are not fast food!—What a fool I am, indeed, to stand here and invite sin.—I must be gone!'—and the pious blacksmith ran out of the house at full speed.

The devil sitting in the bag was already rejoicing over his prey and could not suffer such a rich prize to slip through his fingers. As soon as the blacksmith put down the bag he jumped out and got astride of Vakula's shoulders.

A cold shiver passed over the blacksmith's skin; he went pale with fright and did not know what to do; he wanted to cross himself, but the devil bent down and with his dog's muzzle whispered in his right ear, 'It's only I, your friend; I will do everything for a friend and comrade! I will give you as much money as you require,' squeaked he in his left ear. 'Oksana will be ours to-day,' he lisped, turning his muzzle to the right ear. The blacksmith stood plunged in thought.

'I am willing—' said he at last '—for that price I am willing to be yours.'

The devil spread his arms and began to dance with joy round the blacksmith's neck. 'Now I've caught this blacksmith,' thought he. 'Now I'll have my revenge, my sweet fellow, for all your daubs and all the vile fictions you have imputed to us devils. What will my comrades say when they hear that the most pious man of the whole village is now in my power?'

The devil laughed with joy when he thought of how he would crow over the whole betailed race of hell, and how angry the lame devil, considered the most inventive among them, would be.

'Well, Vakula,' whispered the devil, still sitting on his shoulders, as if afraid that he might run away,

'you know that without a contract nothing can be done.'

'I am ready,' said the blacksmith; 'I have heard that you require one to sign with blood; wait a minute, I'll find a nail in my pocket.'

Here he put his hand behind him and caught the devil by the tail.

'What a wag we are!' cried the devil laughing; 'have done, that's enough fooling!'

'Wait a moment, my fine fellow!' cried the blacksmith. 'What do you think of this?'—he made the sign of the cross and the devil became as quiet as a lamb. 'Wait a bit,' said he, again pulling him to the ground by the tail: 'I'll teach you to lead honest people and good Christians into sin.'

Then the blacksmith got astride his back and lifted his hand to cross himself.

'Have mercy, Vakula,' groaned the devil; 'I will do anything you want, only let my soul go to do penance: do not put the terrible cross upon me!'

'So that's the tune you sing now, you damned German. Now I know what to do. Carry me on your back at once, do you hear, and fly as quick as a bird.'

'Where to?' asked the melancholy devil.

'To Petersburg, straight to the Tsaritsa,' and the blacksmith almost fainted with fright when he felt he was being lifted into the air.

Oksana stood for a long time thinking of the blacksmith's strange words. Her conscience seemed to tell her she had been too cruel to him. 'What if he should really decide on something desperate? It might be! Perhaps out of spite he will fall in love with another girl, and to vex me call her the prettiest girl of the village. No, he won't do that, he loves me. I am so beautiful! He'll never desert me for another; he is playing the fool, only pretending. In less than ten minutes he will come back to have a look at me—I am really too severe.—I must let him kiss me



as if I were unwilling. He'll be delighted.' The next minute the giddy beauty was laughing and joking with the other girls.

'Stop!' said one of the girls, 'the blacksmith has forgotten to take his bags. Just look at them, what huge sacks! He has had better luck as a wait than we have; I think they must have thrown him whole quarters of mutton and lots of loaves and sausages. What luxury! There's enough here to feast on all the holidays.'

'Are these the blacksmith's sacks?' said Oksana. 'Let's drag them to my cottage, and examine them properly and find out what he has put in them.'

All laughingly approved of this suggestion. 'But we shall never be able to lift them,' cried they as the whole party tried to move the sacks.

'Wait a minute,' said Oksana; 'let's run for a sledge—we can drag them away on it.'

They all ran to get the sledge.

The prisoners were very tired of staying so long in the sacks, and the cantor had made a hole with his finger to peep through. Had not so many people been about, he might have found means of escaping; but to creep out of the sack before everybody would only have made him ridiculous—this notion restrained him, and he decided to wait, grunting a little under the pressure of Chub's thick boots. Chub was no less anxious to get free, as he felt that what he had under him was something very uncomfortable to sit on; but as soon as he heard his daughter's decision, he calmed down and no longer wanted to get out, as he calculated he would have to walk at least a hundred steps and perhaps more to get home; and when he got out of the sack he would have to arrange his clothes, fasten his sheep-skin, tie up his belt—what a lot of work, and besides, his cap had been left behind at Solokha's. Better let the girls drag him home on a sledge.

However, things happened quite in a different way from what Chub expected. The moment the girls



ran to fetch the sledge, Chub's thin *kum* came out of the tavern, very much put out and in a bad humour. The tavern-keeper had positively refused to give him anything on credit. He wanted to wait in the tavern on the chance that some pious nobleman might come who would stand him a drink, but just on that night all the noblemen stayed at home, and like good Christians ate *kutya* with their families. Thinking of the depravity of the people, and of the hard heart of the Jewess who kept the tavern, he suddenly came upon the sacks and stopped in surprise. 'Just see what sacks some one has left on the road!' he said, looking round. 'I expect there'll be pork here. Who's had the luck to collect so many good things for his carols? What a formidable load! Even supposing they are filled with buckwheat or wheaten bread it would be lucky, and if they are full of cakes, one can indeed smack one's lips: for every cake the old Jewess will give a measure of vodka. How can I get them away before she sees them?'

He took the sack which contained Chub and the cantor on his back, but soon felt it too heavy for him. 'No, it will be too heavy for one man to carry,' said he. 'Ah! good luck! here comes the weaver Shapovalenko. How do you do, Ossip?'

'How are you?' answered the weaver, stopping.

'Where are you going?'

'Just anywhere, wherever my legs take me.'

'Help me, there's a good fellow, to carry these sacks! Somebody has been out collecting and left them in the middle of the road. We can share the goods.'

'Sacks? what's in them,—loaves or cakes?'

'All sorts of things, I think.'

They soon pulled sticks out of the wattle-fence, and placing the sack on them carried it off on their shoulders.

'Where shall we take it? To the tavern?' asked the weaver.

'I thought of the tavern too, but the damned Jewess will not believe us, she'll think we have stolen it;



and besides, I have just come from the tavern. Let us carry it to my cottage; nobody will disturb us there. My wife is not at home.'

'Are you sure she's not at home?' asked the careful weaver.

'Thank God we are not quite mad yet,' said Chub's *kum*. 'The devil won't make me go where she is. I expect she will be roaming about with the other women till morning.'

'Who is there?' called out the *kum's* wife when she heard the noise the two cronies made in the passage as they brought in the sack, and she opened the door.

Chub's friend was stupefied.

'Here's a pretty go!' said the weaver disconsolately.

The *kum's* wife was one of those treasures that are often to be found in this blessed world. Like her husband she was seldom at home, but passed most of her days in her friends' homes, or in the houses of wealthy old women; she flattered them, ate with great appetite, and only fought with her husband in the mornings because that was the one time they ever met. Their cottage was twice as old as the *sharovary*<sup>1</sup> of the village scribe, and the roof was in some places without thatch. Of the wattle-fence only a few remains could be seen, as nobody when he left home ever took a stick with him to keep off the dogs, in hopes of passing the old *kum's* orchard and being able to take any stick he liked out of his fence. Their stove was not heated sometimes for three days. All that the gentle wife was able to beg from her good neighbours she hid away as far as she could from her husband, and often despotically took from him any booty he might have collected, if he had not already found time to drink it away in the tavern. The old *kum*, notwithstanding all his coolness, did not like to give in to her, and consequently seldom left the house without two black eyes, while his better half crawled away groaning to the old village gossips with

<sup>1</sup> Baggy Cossack trousers.

stories of the disorderly behaviour of her husband, and of the beatings she had to endure from him.

One can imagine in what a fix the weaver and the *kum* found themselves at this unexpected apparition. They put down the sack and stood before it, trying to hide it behind the skirts of their long coats, but it was too late; the *kum's* wife, although she saw badly with her old eyes, had already caught sight of it. 'Now that's good,' she said with the delighted look of a hawk about to pounce on its prey. 'I'm glad you have collected so much! That's what good people ought to do; but no, I expect you have pinched it somewhere. Show it me at once, do you hear? show me your sack this minute.'

'The bald devil may show it you, but not we,' said the old *kum*, assuming an air of dignity.

'What business is it of yours?' said the weaver; 'we have collected it, not you.'

'No, you shall show it me, you worthless drunkard!' cried the old woman, giving the tall *kum* a blow on the chin with her fist and making her way to the sack.

But the weaver and his old friend defended the sack bravely, and obliged her to retreat. Before they had time to recover themselves, the old woman ran into the passage with a poker in her hand, gave her husband a blow with it on the hands and the weaver one across the back, and in an instant stood over the sack.

'Why did we let her come near it?' said the weaver, recovering himself.

'Eh! Why did we let her—why did you let her—?' said the *kum* calmly.

'You seem to have an iron poker,' said the weaver after a short silence, rubbing his back. 'My wife bought a poker last year at the market, gave twenty-five kopecks for it; that one's not so bad—it does not hurt . . .'

The triumphant wife placed her light on the floor and proceeded to untie the sack and look into it.

But her old eyes, which had seen the sack so well, now probably played her false.



'Eh, here we have a whole boar!' she cried in delight, and began clapping her hands.

'A whole boar, do you hear? a whole boar!' said the weaver to his old friend. 'It's all your fault!'

'What's to be done?' answered the old *kum*, shrugging his shoulders.

'How! what's to be done? Why are we standing here? We must take the sack away from her! Now, you begin.'

'Go away, go away! That's our boar!' cried the weaver, taking a step forward.

'Get along, get along, you devil of an old woman. This is not your property!' said her husband, also coming nearer.

The old woman again seized the poker, but in the meantime Chub had crept out of the sack and was standing in the middle of the passage stretching himself like a man just awakening from a long sleep.

The old woman screamed and struck her skirt with her hands, and involuntarily all of them opened their mouths.

'What did the old fool say? a boar! This is no boar!' said the *kum* with eyes starting out of his head.

'Do you see what a man has been thrust in a sack?' said the weaver, stepping back from fright. 'You may say what you like, you can burst, but this has not been done without the evil powers. He could not even get through a window.'

'Why, it's my friend Chub!' cried the *kum*, looking at him more closely.

'And who did you think it was?' asked Chub, laughing. 'I've played you a good trick. So you wanted to eat me instead of pork? Wait a bit, I'll give you a treat; there's something else in the sack; if it is not a boar it's sure to be a sucking pig or some other animal. Something was always moving about under me.'

The weaver and the old *kum* pounced upon the sack from one end, the mistress of the house got hold

of the other, and the fight would have begun again if the cantor, seeing that there was now no means of escape for him, had not managed to scramble out of the sack.

The old woman was dumbfounded, and let go the leg by which she had begun to drag the cantor out of the sack.

'Here we have another one!' cried the frightened weaver. 'The devil only knows what the world's coming to. It makes one's head go round. Not sausages and cakes are thrown into the bags! it's people nowadays!'

'It's the cantor!' exclaimed Chub, who was the most surprised of them all. 'Here's a nice kettle of fish. Oh, oh, Solokha! Solokha! She puts them into sacks! Now I come to think of it, her whole cottage was full of sacks. Ah, I see it all now! she had two men hidden in each of the sacks, and I thought I was the only one. . . . So that's Solokha!'

The girls were rather surprised to find one sack less when they returned.

'There's nothing for it; we shall have enough as it is,' said Oksana.

They all seized the sack and put it on the sledge.

The mayor decided to remain silent, as he feared if he called out to them to untie the sack and let him out, the silly girls would run away thinking there was a devil in it, and that he would be left in the street, perhaps till the next day.

Taking one another by the hand the girls started off running with the sledge over the squeaking, frozen snow. Many of them for fun sat on the sledge, some even climbed on to the mayor. The mayor decided to put up with whatever happened.

At last they arrived at the cottage, opened wide the doors of the passage, and with much laughter dragged the sack into the cottage.

'Now let's see what we have here!' cried the girls, hastening to untie the sack.



The hiccup that had troubled the mayor all the time he had been in the sack increased so much that he began to cough in addition to his loud hiccups.

'There's a man in the sack!' cried the startled girls, and they all ran out of the cottage.

'What the devil does this mean? Where are you all running like mad?' said Chub, coming into the cottage.

'Oh, daddy,' called Oksana, 'there's somebody in the sack!'

'In the sack? Where did you find the sack?'

'The blacksmith threw it down in the middle of the road,' they all shouted together.

'Now then, didn't I say so?' thought Chub. 'What are you frightened of? Let me have a look. Come, my good man, please don't be offended if we do not address you by your right names—come out of the sack!'

The mayor crawled out.

'Oh!' exclaimed the girls.

'And the mayor too sneaked his way in there,' said Chub to himself in perplexity, measuring him from head to foot. 'So that's it. Hm. . . . He could say no more.

The mayor was no less confused, and did not know what to say. 'It must be very cold outside?' he said at last, turning to Chub.

'Yes, there's a frost,' answered Chub. 'Allow me to ask you what you smear your boots with, pitch or tar?' This was not what he wanted to say; he wanted to ask: 'Tell me, mayor, how did you manage to get into that sack?' and he could not understand how he came to say something quite different.

'Tar is better,' said the mayor. 'Well, good-bye, Chub,' and pressing his cap tighter on his head he left the cottage.

'Now why was I such a fool as to ask him what he smeared his boots with?' exclaimed Chub, looking at the door through which the mayor had just disappeared. 'Eh, eh, Solokha, to put such a man into

a sack!—A devil of a woman! What a fool I am! —Where's that damned sack?'

'I threw it in the corner. There is nothing more in it,' said Oksana.

'I know these sort of tricks—there's nothing more in it! Bring it here; there is some one else sitting in it. Shake it properly.—What, there's nothing more?—That damned woman! And to look at her she seems a saint—every feast day is a fast to her!'

But let us leave Chub to pour out his vexation at leisure, and let us return to the blacksmith, as it must already be nearly nine o'clock.

At first Vakula was frightened, especially when he rose into the air to such a height that he could see nothing below him and flew like a fly just under the moon; indeed, he was so close to it, that if he had not bent down, he would have touched it with his cap. In a short time, however, he became bolder and began to joke with the devil. (He was most amused when the devil sneezed and coughed at the sight of a cypress cross he took from his neck and showed it him. He often, on purpose, raised his hand to scratch his head, and the devil, thinking he wanted to make the sign of the cross over him, flew all the faster.) It was light so high up. The air, like a thin silver mist, was quite transparent. Everything was visible; you could see how the whirlwind carried past them a wizard sitting in a pot; how the stars collected in groups and played blind-man's buff; how swarms of spirits whirled together in corners like clouds; how a devil darning in the moonlight took off his hat to the blacksmith when he saw him riding pickaback; how the broom-stick on which a witch had been riding to her destination flew past them on its way home. Much more rubbish they saw in their flight. Everything they passed stopped for a moment to look at the blacksmith, and then continued its occupation. The blacksmith flew on and on, until suddenly Petersburg shone before his eyes as if it



were on fire. The town was illuminated for some festivity. The devil flew over the town gate and changed into a horse, and the blacksmith found himself on a smart steed in the middle of a street.

My God, the noise and clatter and glare! On both sides of him towered four-storied houses: the noise of horses' hoofs and the sound of wheels re-echoed like thunder from everywhere: the houses seemed to grow up out of the earth at every step: the bridges trembled: carriages flew past him: the cab-drivers and the postillions shouted: the snow whizzed under the thousands of swiftly-gliding sledges: the pedestrians pressed close to the houses, and their shadows were cast on the walls by the small flat lamps placed along the kerbstones to illuminate the streets, till their heads seemed to reach the roofs and the chimneys.

The blacksmith looked on all sides with astonishment. It seemed to him that all the houses turned their innumerable eyes on him, and were looking at him. He saw so many gentry with fur-lined coats that he did not know to whom he ought to take off his cap. 'Good God, how many swells there are here,' thought the blacksmith; 'I think to myself when anyone in a *shuba*<sup>1</sup> passes me, "This must be an assessor," and "This must be an assessor"; and those who drive in such fine *britzkas* with glass windows, why, if not police-masters, they must at least be commissars, perhaps even higher.' His thoughts were broken into by the devil's asking, 'Are we to go straight to the Tsaritsa?' 'No, I'm afraid,' thought the blacksmith. 'The Cossacks from beyond the rapids, who passed through Dikanka last autumn, put up somewhere here. They came from Sêchi, with documents for the Tsaritsa; it would be a good thing to ask their advice. Eh, Satan, get into my pocket, and lead me to the Cossacks from beyond the rapids.'

In a moment the devil became so small that without any difficulty he was able to get into the blacksmith's

<sup>1</sup> A fur cloth-covered coat.

pocket. Before Vakula could look round, he found himself in front of a fine house. He entered it without knowing how, went up the stairs, opened a door, and stepped back, blinded by the brilliance of the room he saw. He was encouraged when he recognised the same Cossacks that had passed through Dikanka. They were now sitting on silk divans, with their tar-smearred boots tucked under them, and smoking the very strongest tobacco usually called 'roots.'

'Good health to you, *pani*! God help you! so this is where we meet again!' said the blacksmith, approaching nearer and bowing to the ground.

'What man is this?' asked the Cossack who was sitting nearest to Vakula of one who sat a little farther off.

'You don't recognize me?' said the blacksmith. 'It is I, Vakula, the blacksmith! When you passed through Dikanka last autumn you stayed with me nearly two days, may God give you health and long life! I made a new tire to the front wheel of your *kibitka*!'

'Ah,' said the Cossack, 'it is the blacksmith who paints so well. How are you, fellow-countryman? Why has God sent you here?'

'Oh, I only wanted to have a look round; they say . . .'

'Well, fellow-countryman,' said the Cossack, assuming a dignified air and wanting to show that he could speak Russian, 'it's a big town.'

The blacksmith, who did not want to confess that he had only just arrived, and who, as the reader knows, could speak the book language too, answered in Russian, very calmly, 'The town is a considerable one, that is very certain; the buildings are enormous, the pictures that hang outside are important.<sup>1</sup> Many houses have wonderful writing all over them in letters of gold-leaf. You can't deny that the proportions are beautiful!'

The Cossacks, hearing the blacksmith express himself  
<sup>1</sup> These are the pictorial sign-boards over the shop windows.



with so much ease, were much impressed in his favour.

'We will have further talk with you later, countryman ; now we must go at once to the Tsaritsa.'

'To the Tsaritsa ? Be good to me, *pani*, and take me with you.'

'Take you ?' answered the Cossack, with the look that a tutor gives his four-year-old pupil who asks to be put on a real—that is to say a big—horse. 'What will you do there ? No, we can't.' And again he looked very important. 'We, brother, are going to discuss our own affairs with the Tsaritsa.'

'Please take me,' begged the blacksmith.—'Ask them to take me!' he whispered to the devil in his pocket, giving him a punch with his fist.

He had scarcely had time to say this when another Cossack said, 'Let us take him with us, brothers ; why shouldn't we ?'

'Suppose we do,' said a third.

'Go and put on clothes like ours.'

The smith hurried to get into a green caftan, and had hardly done so when the door opened and a man in a gallooned livery announced that it was time to start.

The blacksmith found it all very wonderful as he drove through the streets in a huge carriage, which swung on its springs ; the four-storied houses ran past on both sides, and the thundering pavement seemed to slip from under the horses' hoofs.

'My God, how light it is here !' thought the blacksmith ; 'with us it is not so light even by day.'

The carriage stopped at the palace, and the Cossacks got out, stepped into a magnificent entrance-hall and began mounting the brilliantly lighted staircase.

'What a wonderful staircase,' thought Vakula ; 'it's a pity to tread on it. What ornaments !—and then they say that fairy tales are all lies ! Who the devil says they are lies ! Good God, what a balustrade ! What work ! The iron alone must have cost at least fifty roubles.'

The Cossacks had now got to the top of the stairs and passed through the first room, followed shyly by the blacksmith, who feared at every step to slip on the parquet floors. They went through three saloons and the blacksmith was still lost in amazement. When they entered the fourth he could not resist going up to one of the pictures that hung on the wall. It was a picture of the Virgin with the Child in her arms.

'What a wonderful picture, what splendid painting!' he reflected. 'She looks as if she would speak. She's alive! And the Holy Child! He has clenched His hands and He smiles, poor child! What colours! my God, what colours! I should say there's not a kopeck's worth of ochre in it; it's all greens and lakes. And the blues just shine! Wonderful work! I suppose the ground is all done with the most expensive white lead. And even more wonderful than the painting is this brass handle,' he continued, going to the door and feeling the handle all over; 'it is worthy of even greater admiration. What clean work! All this, I fancy, must have been done by German smiths, at the very highest prices. . . .'

The blacksmith would probably have long continued his deliberations if a lackey in gold-braided livery had not jogged his arm and reminded him that he must keep up with the others. The Cossacks went through two rooms more and then stopped. There they were told to wait. In this saloon there were already assembled numbers of generals in gold-embroidered uniforms. The Cossacks bowed on every side, and remained standing in a group.

A minute later a thick-set man in the uniform of a Hetman and yellow boots entered the room, accompanied by a whole suite of very tall men. His hair was in disorder, one eye was rather crooked, his face wore an expression of arrogant majesty, and his every movement showed that he was accustomed to command. All the generals, who had been walking about so proudly in their gold-laced uniforms, now became



restless, and with low bows seemed to be trying to catch every word he said, to follow even his slightest movements, so as to fly instantly to execute his orders. The Hetman paid but little attention to any of them, only slightly nodding as he went up to the Cossacks.

The Cossacks all bowed to the ground.

'Are you all here?' he asked in a drawling, rather nasal voice.

'Yes, father, we are all here,' answered the Cossacks, again bowing.

'Don't forget to say what I told you.'

'No, father, we won't forget.'

'Is this the Tsar?' asked the blacksmith of one of the Cossacks.

'The Tsar indeed? This is Potemkin himself,' he answered.

In the next room voices were heard, and the blacksmith was quite dazzled when a number of ladies in satin dresses with long trains entered the room, followed by courtiers in gold-embroidered caftans and pigtails behind. He could see only the glitter and nothing more.

The Cossacks all fell on the floor and cried out in one voice: 'Be gracious to us, mother, be gracious!'

The blacksmith seeing them do so also fell on the floor and cried out with great zeal.

'Get up,' said an imperious but pleasant voice. Several of the courtiers hurried to make the Cossacks get up.

'We will not get up, mother! We will die sooner than get up!' cried the Cossacks.

Potemkin bit his lips. At last he approached and whispered to one of the Cossacks, and they all got up.

The blacksmith also ventured to lift his head and saw before him a rather short and corpulent woman with powdered hair and blue eyes, yet with the majestically smiling look which was able to subjugate

everything to her will, and which could only belong to the one woman who ruled.

'His Serene Highness promised to present to me to-day some of my people whom I do not yet know,' said the lady with the blue eyes, looking with curiosity at the Cossacks from beyond the rapids. 'Are you well provided for here?' she continued, coming closer to them.

'Yes, thank you, mother! They give us good provisions, though the mutton here is nothing like what we have beyond the rapids; but why shouldn't one get along as best one can?'

Potemkin frowned, seeing that the Cossacks were not saying at all what he had told them to say.

One of the Cossacks, assuming a dignified air, stepped forward and said:

'Have mercy on us, mother! In what way have your faithful people angered you? Have we taken the hand of the filthy Tartar—have we had an understanding of any sort with the Turks—have we been unfaithful to you in deed or in thought? Why this disfavour? First we hear that you have ordered fortresses to be built on all sides to guard against us; then we hear that you want to turn us into carabineers, now we hear of a new persecution. In what way are the troops from beyond the rapids in fault? Is it because we led your army over the Perekop, and helped your generals to beat the Crimeans? . . .'

Potemkin remained silent, and stood carelessly cleaning with a little brush the diamonds that covered his fingers.

'What is it you want?' said Catherine in a troubled voice.

The Cossacks looked at each other significantly.

'This is the moment! The Tsaritsa asks what we want!' said the blacksmith to himself, and suddenly fell on the ground.

'Your Imperial Majesty, do not have me punished, have mercy on me! Let your Imperial Majesty not be angry, when I ask what the shoes are made of



that are on your feet ? I think there is not a single cobbler in any kingdom on earth who can make the like of them. Oh, Lord ! if only my wife could put on her feet such shoes.'

The Empress laughed. The courtiers laughed too. Potemkin frowned and smiled at the same time. The Cossacks nudged the blacksmith, wondering if he had not gone mad.

'Arise !' said the Empress kindly. 'If you really want to have such shoes, it is not difficult to get them. Bring him, at once, the most costly pair of shoes I have, worked with gold ! Truly this simplicity pleases me.—This is something for you,' continued the Empress, looking at a gentleman who was standing a little apart from the others ; he had a stout but pale face, and his simple caftan with large mother-of-pearl buttons denoted that he was not one of the courtiers.<sup>1</sup> 'This is a subject worthy of your witty pen !'

'Your Imperial Majesty is too gracious ! The pen of a La Fontaine would be required at the very least,' answered the man with the mother-of-pearl buttons, bowing low.

'On my honour, I must tell you, I am still enchanted with your *Brigadier*. You read wonderfully well. However,' continued the Empress, turning to the Cossacks, 'I hear that on the Sech you never marry.'

'Oh ! yes, *máma*. You yourself know a man cannot live without a wife,' answered the Cossack who had spoken to the blacksmith, and Vakula was surprised to hear that this Cossack, who knew the book language so well, should speak to the Tsaritsa, as if purposely, in the commonest, so-called peasant dialect. 'It's a cunning people,' thought he, 'it's not without some reason he is doing this !'

'We are not monks,' continued the Cossack, 'but ordinary sinners, prone like all poor Christians to succumb to festive food. There are not a few among us who have wives, but do not live with them on the

<sup>1</sup> The Court poet Von-Visin, whose comedy *The Brigadier* is mentioned later.

Sech. Some have wives in Poland ; some have wives in the Ukraine ; there are even some who have wives in Turkey.'

At that moment the shoes were brought to the blacksmith.

'My God, what decoration !' he exclaimed in delight, seizing the shoes. 'Your Imperial Majesty ! can it be that Your Honour has such shoes on your feet when you go sliding on the ice ? What must your feet be like ? I think that at the very least they are made of pure sugar !'

The Empress, who really had exceedingly well-made and charming feet, could not help smiling when she heard such a compliment from the lips of this simple blacksmith, who, notwithstanding his dark complexion, might be considered handsome in his Cossack dress.

Delighted with this condescending attention the blacksmith would have liked to ask the Tsaritsa if it was true that Tsars only ate honey and fat, and many other questions, but he felt the Cossacks nudging him and he decided to remain silent. When the Empress turned again to the old men and began to ask them about their life on the Sech, and what their customs were, he retired to the back of the room and stooping towards his pocket said gently : 'Take me away from here quickly.' He had hardly spoken the words when he found himself beyond the town gates.

'He is drowned ; by God, he is drowned ! May I never move from this spot if he is not drowned !' the weaver's fat wife rattled on to a group of Dikanka women who had assembled in the middle of the street.

'What, then, am I a liar ? Have I ever stolen anybody's cow ? Have I ever thrown a spell over anyone that you don't believe me ?' cried an old woman in a short Cossack fur coat, who had a purple nose and was swinging her arms about. 'May I never want to



drink water again if old Pereperchikha with her own eyes did not see the blacksmith hang himself !'

'The blacksmith has hanged himself ? Well, I never !' said the mayor, coming out of Chub's cottage and squeezing his way through the group of women to get nearer those who were talking.

'You had better say "May you never want to drink vodka again," you old drunkard !' answered the weaver's wife. 'One must be as mad as you are to hang oneself. He is drowned ! drowned in a hole in the ice ! I am as sure of it as that you have just come from the tavern.'

'You shameless woman, is that what you throw in one's teeth ?' shouted the enraged old woman with the purple nose. 'You had better hold your tongue, you good-for-nothing. D'ye think I don't know that the cantor comes to you every evening ?'

The weaver's wife flew out :

'What cantor ? Who wants the cantor ? How dare you tell such lies !'

'The cantor ? Who dare say the cantor !' shouted the cantor's wife, who dressed in a long hare-skin fur coat covered with blue cloth had now approached the speakers. 'I will tell him myself. Who says "the cantor" ?'

'This is the woman to whom the cantor goes,' said the old woman with the purple nose, pointing to the weaver's wife.

'So it's you, you bitch !' shouted the cantor's wife, going up to the weaver's wife. 'So it's you, you, who cast spells on him, and who give him foul philtres to drink, to make him come to you !'

'Get away from me, Satan !' cried the weaver's wife, stepping back.

'You damned witch, may you never see your children, you good-for-nothing ! Phew !'—here the cantor's wife spat straight into the eye of the weaver's wife.

The weaver's wife wanted to retaliate in the same way, but spat instead in the unshaven beard of the

mayor, who to hear what was going on had got between the disputing women.

'Ah, you filthy woman!' cried the mayor, wiping his face with the lappet of his coat, and raising his whip. This movement made all the women, still swearing at each other, disperse in different directions.

'What abominations!' repeated the mayor, continuing to wipe his face. 'So the blacksmith has drowned himself! My God! What a fine painter he was! What strong knives, sickles and ploughs he could forge! What a strong man he was! Yes,' continued he after some thought, 'there are few such men in our village. I noticed when I was sitting in that damned sack that the poor fellow was in a very bad mood. So much for the blacksmith! He was—and is no more! Just as I wanted to send him my dappled mare to be shod!' Filled with such Christian thoughts the mayor strolled slowly towards his cottage.

Oksana was upset when these reports reached her. She had no faith in Pereperchikha's eyes and in the old woman's tales. She knew that the blacksmith was too religious to decide to lose his soul. But what if he had really gone away, with the intention of never coming back to the village? It would be difficult to find anywhere such a fine young fellow as the blacksmith. He had loved her so dearly, he had borne with her whims longer than any other. All night long Oksana could not sleep, but turned from right to left, and from left to right under her warm quilt, or tossing everything off lay in her charming nudity, hidden even from herself by the darkness, and often scolded herself almost aloud; then she would get calmer again and would make up her mind not to think any more; but she continued thinking. Her whole body glowed, and before morning she had fallen over head and ears in love with the blacksmith.

Chub did not express either pleasure or grief at the fate of the blacksmith. His mind was occupied with only one thought. He could not forget Solokha's



perfidy, and even in his sleep he did not cease to abuse her.

The morning dawned. Even before it was light the church was filled with worshippers. The elderly women, in white cloaks and white kerchiefs, crossed themselves piously near the door. The noble ladies in green and yellow jackets, some of them even in old-fashioned gold-trimmed surcoats, stood in front of them. The girls, their heads adorned with a whole shopful of ribbons and with necklaces, crosses, and coins round their necks, tried to get as close as they could to the *icon* screen. In front of all stood the nobles and the common peasants, with their moustaches and long hair, thick necks, and freshly shaven chins. They were mostly dressed in long cloaks with caps attached to them, under which could be seen white or sometimes blue short caftans. Wherever you looked all the faces wore a holiday expression. The mayor already licked his lips at the thought of breaking his fast with a dish of sausages. The young girls looked forward to flirting with the lads on the ice, the old women muttered their prayers with greater fervour than usual. All over the church the Cossack Sverbyguz could be heard making his devotions. Only Oksana did not seem to be herself; she tried to pray, but could not. Her heart was so full of various thoughts, one more vexing than the other, each sadder than the other, that her face only wore an expression of great confusion; tears rose to her eyes. The girls could not understand why she looked sad, and never suspected that the blacksmith was the cause of it. It was not Oksana alone who was preoccupied with the blacksmith. Everybody felt that the holiday was not like a holiday—that something was wanting. To add to the misfortune, the cantor was hoarse after his journey in the sack, and his voice could hardly be heard; it is true that a singer who was on a visit in the village had a fine bass voice, but the singing would have been much better if the blacksmith had been there. He always stood up in the aisle and

sang 'Our Father' or the Cherubim hymn to the same melody as was used in Poltava. Besides this, he was the only one who performed the duties of churchwarden. Matins and the Mass that followed were over. What had really become of the blacksmith?

The rest of the night the devil flew faster and faster with the blacksmith on his back, and in the twinkling of an eye Vakula appeared before his cottage. At that moment the cock crowed.

'Where are you off to?' cried Vakula, catching the devil by the tail as he wanted to run away. 'Stop, my friend, that's not all: I have not yet thanked you,' and taking a switch he gave him three lashes, and the poor devil ran away like a peasant who has just been reprimanded by the assessor. Thus instead of deceiving, seducing, and making a fool of others the enemy of mankind was himself fooled.

After all these adventures Vakula went into the passage, buried himself in some hay, and slept until midday. When he awoke he was startled to see that the sun was already high. 'I have slept through matins and Mass,' said he.

The pious blacksmith was plunged in dejection, thinking that God, to punish him for the sinful thoughts he had had of destroying his soul, had sent him a sleep that had prevented him from being in church on this great feast day. He consoled himself, however, by deciding that next week he would make a full confession to the priest, and for a whole year from that day he would bow before the icon fifty times every day. He then looked into the cottage, but nobody was there; Solokha had evidently not yet returned. He carefully took the shoes out of the bosom of his coat, and once more was lost in astonishment at their rich work and at his wonderful adventures of the past night. He then washed and dressed with the greatest care, put on the caftan that the Cossacks from beyond the rapids had given him, and took out of his trunk



a new lambskin cap with a blue crown that he had never once worn since he bought it during his stay in Poltava; he also took out a sash of many colours, put them in a handkerchief, took a whip, and started for Chub's cottage.

Chub stared when he saw the blacksmith come in, and did not know what astonished him most, the blacksmith's having risen from the dead, the blacksmith's daring to enter his cottage, or his being so smartly attired and in the fashion of the Cossacks from beyond the rapids. But he was still more astonished when Vakula untied his handkerchief and displayed before his eyes a new lambskin cap and a sash such as had never been seen in the village before, and falling at his feet said in an entreating voice: 'Have pity on me, father! do not be angry! See here is a whip: beat me to your heart's content. I surrender myself, I confess my sins. Beat me but do not be angry. You yourself drank brotherhood with my late father, ate bread and salt and drank *magarych* with him.'

Chub saw, not without secret pleasure, that the blacksmith, who never troubled about anyone in the village and who could bend a five kopeck piece or a horse-shoe in his hand like a buckwheat cake, was now lying at his feet. So as not to lose dignity, Chub took the whip and struck him three times on the back. 'Now that is enough, get up. Always listen to old people. Let us forget all that has been between us. Now tell me, what do you want?'

'Father, let me have Oksana!'

Chub pondered; he looked at the cap and at the sash—the cap was a beautiful one, the sash was in no way inferior to it; he remembered Solokha's perfidy, and answered in a decided tone:

'I agree; send your *svakhi*.'<sup>1</sup>

'Oh!' cried Oksana, as she crossed the threshold, and seeing the blacksmith she fixed her eyes on him with joy and astonishment.

'Look at the slippers I have brought you,' said

<sup>1</sup> People who arrange marriages.

Vakula; 'they are the very ones that were worn by the Tsaritsa.'

'No, no, I don't want any slippers,' said she, waving them away and not taking her eyes off him. 'Even without shoes I will . . .' She said no more but blushed very red.

The blacksmith went up to her and took her hand; the beauty dropped her eyes. She had never looked so wonderfully lovely. The enraptured blacksmith kissed her tenderly; her blushes became even deeper and she looked still more beautiful.

One day a bishop, of blessed memory, was passing through Dikanka. He praised the beauty of the site on which the village lay and stopped before a new cottage.

'To whom does this beautifully painted cottage belong?' asked his Eminence of a pretty woman who was standing at the door with a child in her arms.

'To the blacksmith Vakula,' answered Oksana, bowing (for it was she).

'Beautiful, very beautiful,' repeated his Eminence, examining the doors and windows. The windows were painted all round with red paint, and on the doors there were paintings of Cossacks on horseback with pipes in their mouths.

His Eminence praised Vakula still more when he heard that he had submitted to Church penance, and had painted the left aisle in green paint with red flowers for no reward.

This, however, is not all. On the side wall as you enter the church Vakula painted a picture representing the devil in hell. He was so terrible that everyone spat when passing it, and the women, when their babies cried, took them to the picture and said, 'See there, look at his picture!'

The children would stop crying, look askance at the picture, and press closer to their mothers' breasts.



# MIKHAIL YUR'EVICH LERMONTOV

1814-41

## TAMAN

TAMAN is the most wretched little town on the whole sea-coast of Russia. I nearly died from hunger there, besides which the people tried to drown me. I arrived there late one night in a post-cart. The post-boy drew up the weary *troika*<sup>1</sup> at the first brick house in the town, which was near the gates. The watchman, a Black Sea Cossack, hearing the tinkle of the bells, called out in a gruff, sleepy voice, 'Who goes there?' A non-commissioned officer and an overseer came out. I explained to them that I was an officer going to the front on military duty, and asked for a billet. The overseer took us round the town. Every cottage we called at was already full. It was a cold night; I had not slept for three nights and was worn out. At last I lost my temper and shouted:

'Take me anywhere, you old rascal—to the devil if you like—but find me a lodging!'

'There's still one other place,' said the overseer, scratching the back of his head, 'but your honour won't like it—it's not clean there!'

Not understanding the exact meaning of his last words, I told him to proceed there at once, and after long wanderings through dirty lanes bordered, as far as I could see, with nothing but broken palings, we drove up to a small hut close by the sea-shore.

The full moon shone on the reed-thatched roof and white walls of my new abode; in the yard, which was surrounded by a wall made of rough, round stones,

<sup>1</sup> A *troika* is any vehicle drawn by three horses abreast.

stood another hovel, leaning to one side, and older and smaller than the first. The cliffs descended abruptly almost from its very wall, and the dark blue waves below splashed with an unceasing murmur. The moon looked down on the restless element under her command, and by her light I could distinguish in the offing two ships, whose black rigging, like a motionless spider's web, was outlined against the pale background of the horizon. 'There are ships in the port,' thought I; 'to-morrow I shall be able to sail for Gelenzhik.'

I had a Cossack of the line serving me as orderly. Instructing him to take down my portmanteau and settle with the driver, I began to call for the master of the house. There was no answer. I knocked—still no answer. 'What is the meaning of this . . . ?' At last a boy of about fourteen crept out of the entrance.

'Where's the master ?'

'There is no master.'

'What, no master at all ?'

'None at all.'

'The mistress then ?'

'Gone to the village.'

'Who'll open the door for me ?' said I, giving it a kick. The door opened of itself. A smell of damp came from the hut. I lit a sulphur match and moved it close to the boy's nose; it lit up two white eyes. He was blind, quite blind from his birth. Motionless he stood before me, and I began to examine his features.

I must confess that I have a great prejudice against all who are blind, crooked, deaf, dumb, without legs, without arms, hump-backed, or otherwise deformed. I have noticed a strange connexion between a man's exterior and his soul; it seems that with the loss of a limb or a faculty the soul also loses some part of its sensitiveness.

I therefore began to examine the face of the blind boy; but what can you see in a face that has no eyes? Long I looked at him with an involuntary feeling of



pity; then suddenly an almost imperceptible smile played about his thin lips and, I don't know why, produced on me a most unpleasant impression. A suspicion came into my mind that this blind boy was not as blind as he seemed; it was useless to tell myself that it was impossible to imitate a cataract, and what could be the reason for doing so? I could not help it. I often have prejudices.

'Are you the mistress's son?' I asked him at last.

'Nay.'

'Who are you then?'

'A poor orphan.'

'Has the mistress any children?'

'Nay; she had a daughter; but she sailed away on the sea with a Tartar.'

'With what sort of a Tartar?'

'The devil only knows. A Crimean Tartar, a boatman from Kertch.'

I entered the hut; two benches, a table, and an enormous trunk standing near the stove were the only furniture in it. There was not a single icon on the walls—a bad sign. Through the broken window-pane the sea wind blew. I took the remains of a wax candle out of my portmanteau, lit it, and began to arrange my things. I placed my sabre and my musket in the corner of the room, I laid my pistols on the table, and spread my *bourka*<sup>1</sup> on one of the benches; my Cossack spread his on the other. Before ten minutes had passed he was snoring, but I could not get to sleep; all the time the boy with white eyes fidgeted before me in the dark.

About an hour passed in this way. The moon shone through the window and her rays played upon the earthen floor of the hovel. Suddenly a shadow crossed the bright line on the floor. I sat up and looked out of the window. Something ran past a second time and disappeared, God knows where. I could not suppose that this creature had run down the perpendicular rocks, but there was no other road it could have taken. I got

<sup>1</sup> A large felt cloak used by the Cossacks.

up, threw on my short tunic, strapped my dagger to my side, and left the hut very quietly. The blind boy came towards me. He was carrying a large bundle under his arm. I hid near the wall, and he passed by me with a careful but firm step, and turning towards the harbour, began to descend a very narrow steep footpath. 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the tongue of the dumb sing,' thought I, as I followed him at a distance, though keeping him well in sight.

The moon became hidden by clouds and a mist covered the sea; through it the light on the stern of the nearest vessel shone dimly to the shore, the foam of the waves sparkled and threatened each moment to drown it. With difficulty I was able to climb down the steep footpath, and when I reached the bottom this is what I saw. The blind boy stopped at the beach and then turned to the right, going along so close to the water's edge that it seemed every minute as if the waves would seize and wash him away. It was evident that it was not the first time he had taken this walk, for he stepped boldly from stone to stone and avoided the pools of water. At last he stopped: for a moment he appeared to be listening for something; then he sat down on the ground, laying his bundle beside him. I hid behind a projecting rock and watched his movements. After a few minutes a white figure approached and sat down next to him. From time to time their conversation was borne to me on the wind.

'Well, blind boy,' said a woman's voice, 'the storm is fierce. Janko won't come.'

'Janko is not afraid of storms,' answered the boy.

'The fog is getting thicker,' said the woman in a tone of regret.

'It is easier to get past the guard-ships in a fog,' came the answer.

'But supposing he gets drowned?'

'Well, what of that? On Sunday you will have to go to church without a new ribbon!'



After this there was silence. One thing surprised me; when the blind boy had spoken to me he had used the Little Russia dialect: now he spoke Russian.

'Look there, I was right,' said the blind boy, clapping his hands. 'Janko is not afraid of the sea, nor the wind, nor the fog, nor even the coast-guards. Listen, that isn't the sound of the waves—I can't be deceived,—that's the sound of his long oars.'

The woman, who was evidently very anxious, jumped up and looked into the distance.

'You're talking nonsense, blind boy; I can't see anything,' said she.

I must own that I also tried to distinguish in the distance some object like a boat, but without any success. About ten minutes passed and then a small spot could be seen between the mountainous waves; it seemed now to grow larger, now to grow smaller again. Slowly mounting the crests of the waves, and rapidly descending into their trough, the boat gradually approached the shore. 'He must be a bold sailor who would venture on such a night to cross a bay twenty versts wide, and the business that brings him must be important,' thought I, as with a beating heart I watched the struggling boat. But she dived like a duck, and then, with a rapid stroke of the oars that looked like the wings of a bird, sprang from the depths in a cloud of spray, and I thought she would strike on the rocks of the coast and be shivered to pieces. But she adroitly turned sideways and entered a little cove uninjured. A middle-sized man in a Tartar sheep-skin bonnet got out and beckoned with his hand to the others, and all three began tugging something out of the boat; the cargo was so large that I still cannot understand how it did not sink the boat. Each taking a bundle, they went along the beach, and I soon lost sight of them. I had to return to the hut, but I must confess that all these strange occurrences had made me so uneasy that I could hardly wait till morning.

My Cossack was very much surprised when he awoke to find that I was already dressed; however, I did not tell him the reason. For some time I stood at the window admiring the blue sky, which was sown with small fragments of cloud. The distant Crimean coast stretched like a purple line, till it ended in a headland on whose summit could be seen the white turret of a lighthouse. Then I went to the Fanagoria fortress, to find out from the commandant the hour of my departure for Gelenzhik.

Alas, the commandant could not tell me anything definite. The ships in the harbour were all either guard-ships or merchant vessels which had not even begun to take in their cargoes.

'Perhaps in three or four days the mail-boat will arrive,' said the commandant, 'and then we'll see what can be done.' I returned home morose and cross. In the doorway I was met by my Cossack, a scared look on his face.

'It's a bad look-out, your honour,' said he.

'Yes, brother; God knows when we shall get away.'

This seemed to make him even more alarmed; he bent down and said in a whisper:

'It's not clean here. This morning I met a Black Sea non-commissioned officer—I know him; last year I was in his detachment; when I told him where we're staying, he said: "Brother, it's not clean there; the people are no good. . . ." I think there's something wrong. What sort of a blind boy is this? He goes about quite alone—to the market for bread and to fetch water. Evidently they are all used to it here.'

'Well, and what of that? At any rate, has the mistress shown herself?'

'Yes, while you were away the old woman came in, and a daughter with her.'

'What daughter? She has no daughter.'

'God knows who she is if she is not her daughter. But look there, the old woman is sitting in her hut.'



I went into the hovel. The oven was well heated, and a dinner, rather luxurious for poor people, was cooking. To all my questions the old woman only answered that she was deaf and could not hear. What was I to do? I turned to the blind boy, who was sitting near the stove throwing sticks on the fire.

'Well, you blind young devil,' said I, pulling his ear, 'just tell me now where you took those bundles to last night.'

Suddenly my blind boy began to cry and to scream, 'Where did I go? I went nowhere—what sort of bundles?—I know nothing about bundles——'

This time the old woman was able to hear and grumbled:

'Nice sort of inventions! and a cripple too. Why do you bully him?—What's he done to you?'

I was irritated with all this, and went away firmly determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

I wrapped myself up in my *bourka*, sat down on a stone near the wall, and looked into the distance. Before me stretched the sea, still rough from the previous night's storm, and the monotonous noise of the waves, like the sound of a great town when it sinks into sleep, reminded me of former days and carried my thoughts back to the north, to our cold capital. Troubled by memories I lost myself in dreams. . . .

Thus an hour passed—perhaps even more. Suddenly something that sounded like a song reached my ears. . . . It was indeed a song, sung by a woman's fresh voice—but whence did it come? I listened. The tune was harmonious, now long drawn out and sad, now quick and gay. I looked round but could see no one. I listened—the sounds seemed to come from the sky. I lifted my eyes; on the roof of my hovel stood a girl in a striped dress with loose flowing hair—she was like a water nymph. Shading her eyes from the sun with her hand, she was gazing intently into the distance; sometimes she laughed and talked to herself, then again began to sing.

I can remember every word of her song :

' On the rolling waves  
Of the deep, green sea,  
Many white-sailed ships  
Sail away from me.  
'Mid those ships is one  
That is borne to me ;  
Two oars guide it on  
The billows of the sea.  
Great ships stretch their wings,  
When winds and storms arise,  
And each her weary course  
Across the waters plies.  
I bow me low and pray :  
" Quell thy wicked wave,  
My own dear little boat  
Upon thy bosom save ! "  
My boat it bears to me  
Treasures manifold,  
Steered through night and storm  
By head and hand so bold.'

A thought involuntarily passed through my mind that I had heard that voice the previous night. For a moment I fell into a reverie, and when I looked up again the girl was no longer there. Suddenly she ran past me humming another tune, and, snapping her fingers, she went up to the old woman and they began to dispute. The old woman was angry, the girl laughed loudly. Then I saw my water-nymph come running and jumping towards me ; when she came to where I was sitting she stopped and looked fixedly in my eyes, as if surprised to see me there ; then carelessly turned away and went towards the landing-stage. This was not the end of it ; all day long she wandered around my quarters ; she never ceased singing and dancing about for a single minute. She was a strange creature ! On her face there were no signs of insanity. Her eyes, on the contrary, rested on me with bold penetration, seemed even to be endowed with a magnetic power. Each time I caught her glance, they appeared to be waiting for a question



from me, but whenever I opened my lips to speak, with an artful smile she would run away.

I had certainly never seen a woman at all like her. She was far from beautiful, but then I have my own prejudices also about beauty. She had breed. Breed in women, as in horses, is a great thing. This discovery we owe to young France. It manifests itself (I mean breed, not France) oftenest in the gait, the hands, the feet; in particular, the nose is of great importance. A regular nose in Russia is rarer than a well-shaped foot. My songstress appeared to be only about eighteen years of age. The unusual suppleness of her figure, the bend of her head in particular, her long fair hair, the golden tint that slightly coloured her sunburnt neck and shoulders, more especially her regular nose—all were bewitching to me. Although I was sensible of something wild and suspicious in her sidelong glances, although there was something undefined in her smile, such is the force of prejudice that the regularity of her nose drove me mad. I imagined I had discovered Goethe's Mignon, that capricious creation of his German fancy. There was, in fact, much resemblance between them, the same rapid transitions from the wildest restlessness to the most complete immobility, the same enigmatic speeches, the same little movements and strange songs. . . .

Towards evening I met her at the door and began the following conversation:

'Tell me, my little beauty, what were you doing to-day on the roof?'

'I was seeing from which side the wind blew.'

'Why did you want to know that?'

'From the side the wind blows, luck comes.'

'Were you attracting happiness by your songs?'

'Where songs are sung, there is happiness.'

'And how if by chance your songs bring you sorrow?'

'Well, what then? Where it is not better, it will be worse. From bad to good is not far.'

'Who taught you that song?'

'Nobody taught it me. When I think of a song, I sing it. Who ought to hear it, will hear it, and who ought not to hear it, will not understand it.'

'What is your name, my songstress?'

'Those who christened me know.'

'And who christened you?'

'How am I to know?'

'Well, you mysterious child! now I shall tell you what I have found out about you.' The expression on her face did not change; she did not move her lips but stood as if it did not concern her. 'I have found out that last night you went to the beach.' Then I very solemnly told her all I had seen, thinking to confuse her very much. She only laughed heartily.

'You have seen much, but know little; and what you do know, keep under lock and key.'

'And what if I decide to inform the commandant?'

and I looked serious, even fierce.

She suddenly jumped away singing and disappeared, like a bird that has been frightened out of a bush. My last words had been quite out of place; I did not suspect their importance at the time, but afterwards I had cause to regret them.

It was just getting dark. I ordered my Cossack to warm up the teapot, as we do at the front, lit a candle, and sat down to enjoy my pipe. I was just finishing my second glass of tea when the door squeaked, and I heard behind me the soft tread of feet and the slight rustle of a dress. I started and looked round—it was my water-nymph. She quietly sat down opposite me and fixed her eyes upon me in silence. I don't know why, her gaze appeared to me wonderfully tender; it reminded me of another gaze that years before had so autocratically played with my life. She seemed to be waiting for some question, but I was silent, feeling unaccountably troubled. Her face was dimly pale and betrayed the agitation of her soul, her hand wandered aimlessly about the table, and I noticed that she trembled slightly; at times her bosom



swelled, at others she seemed to hold her breath. This comedy began to bore me, and I was just about to break the silence in the most prosaic manner by offering her a glass of tea, when suddenly she sprang up and threw her arms round my neck, and a moist fiery kiss was pressed on my lips. It grew dark before my eyes; I felt giddy, and pressed her in my embrace with all the strength of youthful passion, but like a snake she glided out of my arms and whispered in my ear:

'To-night, when all are asleep, come to the shore,' and like an arrow she darted from the room.

In the passage she upset the teapot and candle, which were standing on the floor.

'What a devil of a girl!' exclaimed the Cossack, who had settled himself on the straw and was just about to finish the remains of the tea. It was only then that I came to my senses.

Two hours later, when all had grown quiet in the harbour, I woke my Cossack. 'If I fire my pistol, run to the beach,' I said to him. He stared at me and answered mechanically, 'At your service, your honour.' I stuck my pistol in my belt and went out. She was awaiting me at the top of the descent. Her clothing was scanty enough, and a small shawl encircled her supple figure.

'Come with me,' she said, taking my hand, and we began to descend. I don't understand how I did not break my neck; when we got to the bottom, we turned to the right and went along the very path where the previous night I had followed the blind boy. The moon had not yet risen, and only two stars, like two lighthouses, shone in the dark blue vault. The swelling waves rolled in regularly, one after another, and scarcely moved the solitary boat that was moored to the jetty. 'Let us get into the boat,' said my companion.

I hesitated—I am no lover of sentimental excursions on the sea—but it was too late to go back.

She jumped into the boat, I followed her, and before

I knew where we were, I found that we were floating away.

'What does this mean?' I said angrily.

'This means', said she, making me sit down next to her, and putting her arms around my body—'this means that I love you.' Her cheek pressed against mine and I felt her hot breath on my face. Suddenly I heard a splash in the water; I felt in my belt—my pistol was gone. Then a horrible suspicion crept into my mind, the blood mounted to my head! I looked round—we were about fifty fathoms from the shore, and I cannot swim. The boat began to rock, but I recovered myself, and a desperate struggle began between us. Rage lent me strength, but I soon noticed that I was inferior to my adversary in agility.

'What do you want?' I cried, holding her little hands tightly in my grasp; her fingers cracked, but her serpent nature could endure the pain.

'You saw,' she answered. 'You wanted to inform against us!' and with a superhuman effort she succeeded in throwing me down. We were both hanging half over the side, her hair touching the water. The moment was decisive. I pressed my knee on the bottom of the boat, caught her with one hand by the hair, and clutched her throat with the other; she let go of my clothes, and I instantly threw her into the water.

It was already fairly dark; her head appeared a couple of times in the midst of the sea foam, and then I saw nothing more.

In the bottom of the boat I found half a broken oar, and somehow managed, after long efforts, to reach the landing-stage. As I went along the shore to my hovel, I involuntarily looked in the direction of the place where the night before I had seen the blind boy waiting for the midnight oarsman. The moon was already sailing across the sky, and it appeared to me that some one in white was sitting on the shore. Urged on by curiosity, I crept forward and lay down in the grass under the shadow of the rocks. By stretching my head over the crags I



could see plainly from my hiding-place what was going on below, and was not very much surprised, was even glad, to recognise my water-nymph. She was squeezing out the sea foam from her long hair; her wet shift clung to her supple body and full breast. Soon a boat appeared in the distance and came towards her. As on the previous night a man in a Tartar cap stepped out, but now his hair was cut like a Cossack's, and in his leather belt he had a long dagger.

'Janko,' she said, 'all is lost!' Then their conversation continued in such low tones that I could hear nothing.

'Where's the blind boy?' said Janko at last in a louder voice.

'I have sent him . . . ' came the answer, and a few minutes later the blind boy came along, carrying on his back a bag which they put into the boat.

'Listen, blind boy,' said Janko. 'Guard that place—you understand? There are rich goods there.—Tell' (I could not catch the name) 'that I am no longer his servant; things are going badly—he will see me no more; it's dangerous now. I am going to look for work in another place; he'll never find another venturesome fellow like me. . . . Yes, tell him that if he had paid better for the work, then Janko would not have deserted him. The way is everywhere open to me, wherever the wind blows and the sea roars.' After a short silence Janko continued: 'She will go with me; she can't remain here; and tell the old woman it's time she died; she's lived long enough—she ought to be more reasonable. She'll not see us again.'

'And I?' said the blind boy in a sad voice.

'What good are you to me?' was the answer.

In the meantime my water-nymph had jumped into the boat and beckoned to her companion. He put something in the blind boy's hand and said, 'There, buy yourself some gingerbread with that.'

'Is that all?' said the blind boy.

'What more do you expect?' and the coin rang as it fell on the stones. The blind boy did not pick it up.

Janko got into the boat. The wind was blowing from the shore; they set a small sail and sped quickly away. For a long time the white sail could be seen in the moonlight skimming the dark waves; the blind boy remained sitting on the beach, and I could hear something that sounded like sobbing; the blind boy seemed to be crying—long, very long. It made me sad. Why had fate thrown me into the company of these honest smugglers? Like a stone cast into a smooth well, I had ruffled their calm, and like a stone I had nearly gone to the bottom.

I returned to my quarters. In the passage the candle spluttered on a wooden platter, and my Cossack, contrary to orders, was sleeping a sound sleep, tightly holding his gun in his hand. I left him in peace, took the candle and went into the hut. Alas, my cash-box, my sword with the silver mountings, my Degistan dagger—a present from a friend—were all gone! Then I guessed what the things were which that damned blind boy had brought. I awoke the Cossack with a not too gentle poke and scolded him, becoming very angry, but there was nothing to be done. Would it not have been ridiculous to complain to the authorities that I had been robbed by a blind boy, and nearly drowned by a girl of eighteen? Thank God, the next morning an opportunity offered itself of getting away, and I left Taman. I do not know what became of the old woman and the blind boy. Indeed, what concern have I, an officer travelling by post on government service, with the joys and sorrows of humanity?

## ASHIK-KERIB

### A TURKISH TALE

ONCE upon a time there lived in the city of Tiflis a rich Turk. Allah had given him much gold, but more precious to him than gold was his only daughter Magul-Megeri. The stars in the sky are beautiful,



but beyond the stars live the angels, and they are more beautiful still; so Magul-Megeri was more beautiful than all the girls in Tiflis. There also lived in Tiflis a poor man, Ashik-Kerib. The prophet had bestowed nothing on him but a great heart, and the gift of song. He used to go to weddings and feasts and amuse the rich and happy by playing on his *saas*<sup>1</sup> and singing the praises of the ancient heroes of Turkistan. One day at a wedding he saw Magul-Megeri, and they fell in love with one another. There was but little hope of obtaining her hand for poor Ashik-Kerib, and he grew sad as the winter sky.

One day he lay down in the garden, under the shade of the vines, and fell asleep. At that moment Magul-Megeri passed by with her girl-friends, and one of them seeing the sleeping *ashik*<sup>2</sup> fell behind and went up to him. 'Why are you sleeping under the vines?' she sang; 'madman, your gazelle is passing by!'—He awoke, and the girl fluttered away like a bird. Magul-Megeri heard her song and scolded her. 'If you only knew to whom I sang that song,' she answered, 'you would thank me; it was your Ashik-Kerib.'—'Lead me to him!' said Magul-Megeri, and they went. When she saw his sad face, Magul-Megeri asked him why he was sad and tried to comfort him. 'How can I fail to grieve?' Ashik-Kerib answered; 'I love you, and you can never be mine.' 'Ask my father for my hand,' she said, 'and my father will celebrate our wedding with his money, and will give me so much that there will be enough for us both.' 'Very well,' he answered, 'let us suppose that Aiak-Aga will not grudge anything for his daughter, but who can tell if afterwards you will not reproach me for having nothing and for owing everything to you? No, dear Magul-Megeri, I have pledged my soul, and vowed to wander round the world for seven years, and either obtain riches or perish in some distant wilderness; if you consent to wait, after that time you shall be mine.' She consented, but added that if he did not return

<sup>1</sup> A sort of guitar.

<sup>2</sup> Guitar-player.



by the appointed day she would become the wife of Kurshud-Bek, who had long been courting her.

Ashik-Kerib returned to his mother and received her blessing for his journey; then he kissed his little sister, hung a sack across his shoulders, and leaning on a pilgrim's staff left the town of Tiflis. Soon a rider caught him up; Ashik-Kerib looked at him—it was Kurshud-Bek. 'Good luck to you on your way,' cried the Bek; 'wherever you may go, pilgrim, I will be your companion!' Ashik was not pleased to have such a companion, but there was no help for it. For a long time they went along side by side; at last they came to a river. There was no bridge or ford. 'Swim in front,' said Kurshud-Bek, 'I will follow you.' Ashik threw off his upper clothes and swam across. When he got to the other side he looked back. Oh, ill-luck! Oh, Almighty Allah! Kurshud-Bek had taken his clothes and ridden back to Tiflis: only a cloud of dust that looked like a snake coiled after him over the flat fields. When he got back to Tiflis, Kurshud-Bek took the clothes to Ashik-Kerib's old mother. 'Your son has been drowned in a deep river,' said he; 'here are his clothes.' With inexpressible grief the poor mother fell upon the clothes of her beloved son and shed bitter tears on them; then she carried them to her son's betrothed, Magul-Megeri, and said, 'My son is drowned, Kurshud-Bek has brought me his clothes; you are free.' Magul-Megeri smiled and answered, 'Do not believe it, it is all an invention of Kurshud-Bek's; before seven years have passed no man shall become my husband.' Then she took her *saas* from the wall, and unmoved began to sing poor Ashik-Kerib's favourite song.

In the meantime the wanderer, almost naked and without boots, reached a village. The good people clothed and fed him, and he in return sang wonderful songs to them. In this way he went from village to village, from town to town, and his fame spread everywhere. He arrived at last at Khalaf. As usual he went into a coffee-house, and asking for a *saas* began



to sing. At that time a pasha who was a great patron of singers lived in Khalaf. Many had been brought to him, but not one had pleased him. His servants were weary of searching for singers in every corner of the town. Suddenly, passing by the coffee-house, they heard a wonderful voice. They hurried in. 'Come with us to the great pasha,' they cried, 'or you will answer for it with your head.' 'I am a free man, a pilgrim from the city of Tiflis,' said Ashik-Kerib; 'when I wish to go anywhere, I go—if I do not wish to go, I do not go. I sing when I want to—your pasha is not my master.' Despite all his words, they seized him and carried him to the pasha. 'Sing,' said the pasha, and he sang. He sang the praises of his dear Magul-Megeri, and his song pleased the proud pasha so much that he ordered poor Ashik-Kerib to remain with him. Gold and silver were showered on him, he was covered with brilliant raiment. Ashik-Kerib lived happily and gaily and grew very rich.

I do not know if he had forgotten his Magul-Megen or not, but the seven years were nearly over. The last year would soon be ended, and he did not make any preparations to leave. Beautiful Magul-Megeri began to despair. At that time a merchant was preparing to start from Tiflis with a caravan of forty camels and eighty slaves. She summoned the merchant to her, and gave him a golden dish. 'Take this dish,' she said, 'and whatever town you come to show this dish in your shop, and announce everywhere that whoever claims to be the owner of my dish and can prove his claim, shall receive it, and in addition its weight in gold.' The merchant departed and in every town did Magul-Megeri's bidding, but nobody claimed to be the owner of the golden dish. He had sold almost the whole of his merchandise; with the remainder he arrived at Khalaf. Everywhere he announced what Magul-Megeri had ordered him to say. Hearing of it, Ashik-Kerib ran to the caravansera and saw the dish in the Tiflis merchant's shop. 'This is my dish,' he said, seizing it in his hands. 'It is



certainly yours,' said the merchant; 'I recognize you, Ashik-Kerib. Go quickly to Tiflis, your Magul-Megeri bade me tell you that the seven years will soon be passed, and that if you come not on the appointed day, she will marry another.'

In despair Ashik-Kerib clasped his head in his hands. There were only three days wanting till the fatal hour. Nevertheless he got on his horse, took with him a bag of gold coins, and rode away. He did not spare his horse. At last the exhausted steed fell down and breathed his last on the Erzingian hills, which lie between Erzigan and Erzerum. What was he to do? From Erzigan to Tiflis was a whole month's journey, and only two days remained. 'Almighty Allah!' he cried, 'if you do not help me there is nothing on this earth left for me to do!' and he was about to throw himself from the top of a high cliff. Suddenly he saw at the bottom a horseman on a white steed, and he heard a loud voice—'Youth, what do you want to do?' 'I want to die,' said Ashik. 'If you want to die, come down and I will kill you.' Ashik managed somehow to climb down the steep rocks. 'Follow me,' said the rider in a loud voice. 'How can I follow you? your horse flies like the wind and I am burdened with my wallet!' 'That's true! Hang your wallet on my saddle, and follow me.' Ashik-Kerib, however fast he ran, was soon left behind. 'Why are you lagging behind?' asked the rider. 'How can I follow you? your horse is faster than thought, and I am exhausted.' 'Well, mount up behind me, and tell me the truth: where do you want to go?' 'If I could only get to Erzerum to-day!' answered Ashik. 'Shut your eyes!' He shut them. 'Now open them!' Ashik looked: before him shone the white walls and sparkling minarets of Erzerum. 'Grant me pardon, Aga,' said Ashik; 'I have made a mistake. I wanted to say that I must go to Kars.' 'It is as I thought,' answered the rider. 'I warned you that you must tell me the exact truth. Shut your eyes again! Now open them!'



Ashik could not believe his eyes when he saw Kars before him. He fell on his knees and said, 'I am to blame, Aga, your servant Ashik-Kerib is thrice to blame! But you yourself know that when a man has decided to lie in the morning he must lie all day. It is to Tiflis that I must really go.' 'Ah! you are untrustworthy!' said the rider angrily, 'but what's to be done? I forgive you. Shut your eyes! Now open them again!' he said after a minute. Ashik cried out with joy; they were at the gates of Tiflis. Heartily thanking the rider, Ashik took his bag from the saddle. Then he added, 'Aga, it is true that your beneficence is great, but do even more for me, I pray you: if I relate that I have made the journey from Erzigan to Tiflis in a single day, nobody will believe me—give me some proof.' 'Stoop down,' said the rider smiling; 'take from under the horse's hoof a clod of earth and put it in your bosom; if the people do not believe your true words, order them to bring you a blind woman who has been blind for seven years, and smear her eyes with it and she will see.' Ashik took a piece of earth from under the hoof of the white horse, but ere he had time to lift his head the rider and the white horse had vanished. Then he was convinced in his soul that his benefactor was no other than Khaderiliaz.<sup>1</sup>

It was late at night before Ashik-Kerib was able to find his house. He knocked at the door with a trembling hand and called, '*Ana, ana,*<sup>2</sup> open the door! I am God's guest, and am cold and hungry! I beg you, for the sake of your wandering son, to let me in!' The weak voice of the old woman answered, 'For night travellers there are the houses of the rich and strong. There are weddings in the town—go thither, there you will be able to pass the night in pleasure.' '*Ana,*' he answered, 'I know nobody here, and therefore repeat my request: for the sake of your wandering son let me in!' Then his sister said to her mother, 'I will get up and open the door

<sup>1</sup> Saint George.

<sup>2</sup> Mother.



to him.' 'You good-for-nothing,' answered the old woman, 'you are glad to receive young men and to entertain them, because it is now seven years since I lost my sight from shedding so many tears.' But her daughter, paying no attention to her reproaches, got up, opened the door and let Ashik-Kerib in. He uttered the customary words of greeting, sat down, and with secret agitation began to look around. He saw hanging on the wall in a dusty case his sweet-sounding *saas*, and asked his mother, 'What is hanging on your wall?' 'You are a very inquisitive guest. It is enough for you that you will get a piece of bread, and that to-morrow you will be wished Godspeed on your way.' 'I have already told you that you are my mother,' he said, 'and that this is my sister. I therefore beg you, tell me what is hanging on the wall?' 'It's a *saas*, a *saas*,' answered the old woman angrily, not believing him. 'And what is the meaning of *saas*?' '*Saas* means a thing you play on and sing songs to.' Then Ashik-Kerib asked her to allow his sister to take it down and show it to him. 'That cannot be,' answered the old woman, 'that *saas* belonged to my unfortunate son; it is now seven years that it has been hanging on the wall and no living hand touched it.' But his sister rose and took the *saas* from the wall and gave it to him. Then he looked up to heaven and uttered the following prayer: 'O Almighty Allah! if I am to attain the desired end, then my seven-stringed *saas* will be as well attuned as it was on the day when I last played on it.'

He struck the brass strings and they answered harmoniously, and he began to sing: 'I am a poor *kerib*<sup>1</sup> and my words are poor, but the great Khaderiliaz helped me to descend a steep rock. Although I am poor and my words are poor, still know me, oh, mother; know your wanderer!' Then his mother began to sob and asked him: 'How are you called?' 'Rashid,'<sup>2</sup> he answered. 'You have had your say,

<sup>1</sup> Wanderer

<sup>2</sup> The simple-minded.



now listen. Rashid,' she said, 'with your words you have cut my heart to pieces. This night I dreamed that the hair of my head grew white. It is now seven years since my tears made me blind. Tell me, you who have his voice, when will my son come back?' and twice she repeated her question in tears. It was useless for him to say he was her son, she would not believe him. After a while he asked: 'Mother, let me take the *saas* and go, for I have heard there is a wedding close by; my sister will show me the way. I will play and sing, and whatever I am given I will bring here and share with you.' 'I will not allow it,' said the old woman: 'never since my son went away has his *saas* left the house.' He swore he would not injure a single string. 'And if even a string should break I will answer for it with all I possess,' he continued. The old woman felt his bag, and when she knew it was full of coins, she allowed him to go. His sister conducted him to a rich house where a wedding-feast was being celebrated, and she stopped near the door to see what would happen.

Magul-Megeri lived in this house, and that night she was to become the wife of Kurshud-Bek. Kurshud-Bek was feasting with his relations and friends, while Magul-Megeri sat behind a rich *chadra*<sup>1</sup> with her girl friends. In one hand she held a cup of poison, and in the other a sharp dagger, and she swore that she would sooner die than lay her head on Kurshud-Bek's couch. Through the curtain she heard that a stranger had arrived, who said, '*Salaam aleikum*, you are feasting and amusing yourselves here; allow me, a poor wanderer, to sit down with you, and for that I will sing you a song.' 'Why should he not?' said Kurshud-Bek. 'Singers and dancers shall be admitted here, because this is a wedding-feast; sing us something, *Ashik*, and I will give you a whole handful of gold when you leave.'

Then Kurshud-Bek asked him, 'What is your name, wanderer?' '*Shindi-gerursez*.'<sup>2</sup> 'What name is that?'

<sup>1</sup> Curtain

<sup>2</sup> 'You shall soon know.'



said the other laughing; 'this is the first time I have heard a name like that.' 'When my mother was bearing me and was in travail, many of the neighbours came to the door and asked: "Has God sent her a son or a daughter?" They were answered, "*Shindi-gerursez*." And that is why when I was born this name was given me.' Then he took his *saas* and began to sing:

'In the city of Khalaf I drank Mezzehrian wine, but God gave me wings, and I flew here in three days.'

Kurshud-Bek's brother, a feeble-minded man, drew his dagger and said, 'You lie! How can you travel here from Khalaf in three days?'

'Why do you want to kill me?' said Ashik; 'singers are used to collect in one place from all the four corners of the earth; I ask nothing of you—believe me or not, as you like.'

'Let him continue,' said the bridegroom, and Ashik-Kerib began to sing again:

'My morning devotions I performed in the valley of Erzigan; the midday devotions in Erzerum; the devotions before the setting of the sun in Kars, and the night devotions in Tiflis. Allah gave me wings, and I flew here. God grant that I may become a sacrifice to the white horse; he ran as quickly as a dancer on the tight rope; he jumped from the mountains to the ravines, from the ravines to the mountains. Our Lord gave *Ashik* wings, and he has flown here in time for Magul-Megeri's wedding.'

Then Magul-Megeri recognized his voice, and threw away the poison on one side and the dagger on the other. 'That's how you keep your word,' said her girl friends; 'so to-night you intend to become the wife of Kurshud-Bek?' 'You have not recognized the voice dear to me, but I have,' and taking a pair of scissors she cut through the *chadra*. When she looked and recognized her dear Ashik-Kerib, she cried out and threw her arms round his neck, and they both fell down insensible. Kurshud-Bek's brother threw himself on them with his dagger, intending to kill them both, but Kurshud-Bek stopped him and



said, 'Be calm, and know that a man cannot escape what is written at birth on his forehead.'

When she came to her senses, Magul-Megeri blushed with shame, covered her face with her hands, and hid behind the *chadra*.

'Now I know that you are really Ashik-Kerib,' said the bridegroom; 'but tell us how you could traverse such a long distance in so short a time?' 'To prove the truth of my words,' said Ashik-Kerib, 'my sabre will cut through a stone, and if I lie may my neck become thinner than a thread. But better still, let a blind woman who has not seen God's light for seven years be brought to me, and I will restore her sight.' When Ashik-Kerib's sister, who was standing at the wall near the door, heard these words she ran to her mother and cried, 'Mother, he is really my brother, your son Ashik-Kerib,' and she took the old woman by the hand and led her to the wedding feast. Then Ashik took the piece of earth from his breast, dissolved it in water, and smeared it on his mother's eyes, saying, 'Know, all ye people, how powerful and great Khaderiliaz is.' And his mother recovered her sight. After that nobody dared question the truth of his words, and Kurshud-Bek resigned to him without a word the beautiful Magul-Megeri.

Then in his joy Ashik-Kerib said to him, 'Listen, Kurshud-Bek; I will console you! My sister is in no way less beautiful than your former bride; I am rich, she shall have no less silver and gold; therefore take her to yourself, and be as happy with her as I am with my dear Magul-Megeri!'

# IVAN SERGEEVICH TURGENEV

1818-83

ASYA

I

I WAS then about twenty-five (began N. N.). It's an affair of days long past, as you see. I had just gained my freedom and gone abroad, not, as it was customary to say at that time, 'to complete my education,' but simply because I wanted to see God's world. I was young, healthy, and in high spirits, I had money in plenty; troubles had as yet not touched me; I lived without looking back, did what I wanted—in a word, I flourished. At that time it never entered my head that man is not a plant and cannot flourish very long. Youth eats a gilded ginger-nut and thinks it his daily food; but the time comes when he will beg for a bit of bread. But to talk about this is useless. . . .

I travelled without any object, without any plan; stopped whenever a place pleased me, and went on again as soon as I felt the desire to see new faces—especially faces. I was interested exclusively in people; I could not bear famous monuments or remarkable collections; the very sight of a guide aroused in me a feeling of *ennui* and vexation—I almost went mad in the Dresden Grüne Gewölbe. Nature had a powerful influence on me, but I did not love her so-called beauties, extraordinary mountains, rocks, and waterfalls; I did not want her to obtrude on me or distract me. But people, live human faces,



the speech of men, their movements, their laughter, were what I could not live without. In crowds I always felt especially happy and comfortable. It amused me to go where others went, to shout when others shouted—and at the same time I liked to watch their manner of shouting. It interested me to observe people; I did not even observe them, I examined them with a joyful and insatiable curiosity. But I am again digressing.

Well then, about twenty years ago I was staying in the little German town of Z——, on the left bank of the Rhine. I was in need of solitude. I had just been pierced to the heart by a young widow whom I had met in a watering-place. She was very pretty and clever, and flirted with everybody, with me, poor sinner, too. At first she encouraged me, but in the end she wounded me cruelly by sacrificing me for a young, rosy-cheeked Bavarian officer. I must confess that the wound in my heart was not very deep, but I thought it necessary to abandon myself for a time to melancholy and solitude,—what does not youth amuse itself with?—so I settled down in Z——.

The town attracted me by its situation at the foot of two high hills, by its ruined walls and towers, by its steep bridge spanning a clear little stream, a tributary of the Rhine, but most of all by its excellent wine. Of an evening just after the sun had set (it was June), many pretty, fair-haired German girls walked about the streets of the old town, and when they met any of the foreign visitors, they would greet him in low pleasant voices with '*Guten Abend,*' and many of them did not go home even when the moon rose above the pointed roofs of the old houses and the small stones of the pavement were clearly visible in her steady rays. I liked to wander about the town at that hour, for the moon seemed to be looking fixedly at it from the clear sky, and the town felt that gaze, standing there sensitive and peaceful, all bathed in her light, that tranquil light which all

the time quietly agitates the soul. The weathercock at the top of the high Gothic belfry shone like dim gold; the same gold rippled in waves over the dark glistening stream. Thin candles (the Germans are economical) burned dimly in the narrow windows beneath the slate roofs. The vines stretched their twining tendrils mysteriously over the stone walls; something ran across the three-cornered market-place in the shade near the old fountain; suddenly the sound of the sleepy watchman's whistle reached your ear, and a good-natured dog growled in an undertone; the warm air caressed your cheek and the smell of the limes was so sweet that your breast breathed involuntarily deeper and deeper, and the word 'Gretchen,' either as an exclamation or as a question, rose to your lips.

The little town Z—— lies two miles from the Rhine. I often went to look at the majestic river, and sitting on a stone seat under a huge, solitary ash tree thought for long hours, not without some mental effort, of the cruel widow. A small statue of the Madonna, with an almost childlike face and a red heart pierced with swords on her breast, looked out sadly from the branches. On the other bank of the river lay the little town of L——, somewhat larger than the one where I was staying. One evening I was sitting on my favourite bench looking sometimes at the river, sometimes at the sky or the vineyards. Before me a party of boys climbed about a boat that had been pulled ashore and was lying with its tarred bottom upwards. A few little boats sailed past with slack sails; the green waves glided on with hardly a swell or a ripple. Suddenly the sound of music caught my ear; I listened. In L—— a waltz was being played. The double-bass droned from time to time, the tones of the fiddles were confused, but the flutes sounded shrilly.

'What is that?' I asked an old man in a plush waistcoat, blue stockings, and buckle-shoes, who had just come up.



'That?' he answered, after first moving his pipe from one corner of his mouth to the other. 'Students have come from B—— for a "Commers."'

'Suppose I have a look at this "Commers,"' thought I. 'By the way, I haven't been to L—— yet.' So I found a ferryman and made him take me across.

## II

Perhaps not everybody knows what a 'Commers' is. It is a sort of solemn festival at which the students of one land or brotherhood (*Landsmannschaft*) are assembled. Nearly all who participate in the 'Commers' wear the costume adopted by the German students a long time ago—Hungarian tunics, high boots, and small caps with ribbons of special colours. The students usually meet at dinner under the presidency of their senior and carouse till morning, drink, sing songs, — *Landesvater*, *Gaudeamus*, etc.—smoke, swear at the Philistines, and sometimes even hire a band.

Just such a Commers was being held in the town of L—— in the garden of a little inn with the sign of 'The Sun,' which looked out on the street. The inn and the garden were decorated with flags; the students sat at tables under the well-clipped lime trees, a huge bull-dog lying under one of the tables; on one side in a summer-house covered with ivy the musicians played zealously without ceasing, refreshing themselves with beer. In the street, on the other side of the low garden-wall, a large number of people had collected. The good people of L—— did not neglect this opportunity of gaping at the newly arrived visitors. I mixed with the crowd of spectators; it amused me to watch the faces of the students, to see them embrace, to note the innocent coquetry of youth, their burning glances, to hear their exclamations, their unprovoked laughter—the best laughter in the world,—all this joyous youthful bubbling

life, this fresh struggle forward, no matter where so long as it was forward; this light-hearted freedom touched and excited me. Should I not join them? I asked myself.

'Haven't you had enough, Asya?' said a man's voice in Russian just behind me.

'Let us stay a little longer,' answered a woman's voice in the same language.

I turned round quickly and my eyes fell on a good-looking young man dressed in a cap and a loose jacket. He had on his arm a young girl, not very tall, in a straw hat that covered the whole upper part of her face.

'You are Russians?' escaped involuntarily from my lips. The young man smiled and answered:

'Yes, we are Russians.'

'I never expected—in such an out-of-the-way place—' I began.

'And we too never expected,' he interrupted; 'but what of that? so much the better. Let me introduce myself. My name is Gagin, and this is my'—he hesitated for a moment—'my sister. May I know your name?'

I told him my name and we began to talk. I learned that Gagin, like myself, travelling for pleasure, had come to L—— about a week before and was staying on there. To speak honestly, I was never inclined to pick up an acquaintance with Russians abroad. I recognized them at a distance by their gait, the cut of their clothes, and mainly by the expression of their faces. Their self-satisfied, contemptuous, often imperious expression would change suddenly into one of caution and timidity. The man was at once on the alert; his eyes wandered restlessly.

'Good Lord, have I said something silly? Are they laughing at me?' this hasty glance seemed to say. The moment passed, and the countenance resumed its former expression of stateliness, alternating occasionally with instants of dull perplexity. Yes, I avoided Russians; but Gagin pleased me from the first. There are in the world some such happy faces;



everybody likes to look at them, they seem to warm, to caress you. Gagin had just such a face, a kind, caressing face, with large, soft eyes, and soft, curly hair. He spoke in such a way that even if you did not see his face, you felt by the tone of his voice that he was smiling.

The girl whom he had called his sister appeared to me at first glance to be very pretty. There was something original and characteristic in the lines of her dark-complexioned, round little face, with its small, thin nose, almost childlike cheeks, and bright black eyes. She was graceful in build, but seemed not quite developed. She was not at all like her brother.

'Will you come home with us? I think we have watched these Germans long enough. Now our young men would have broken the glasses and smashed the chairs, but these fellows are much too restrained. What do you say, Asya, shall we go home?'

The girl nodded her head in assent.

'We live beyond the town,' continued Gagin, 'in a solitary house high up in the vineyards. It is charming up there—come and see. The landlady promised to make us some junket. It will soon get dark, so you had better cross the Rhine by moonlight.'

We started. Passing under one of the low gates of the town (old walls made of round stones surrounded it on all sides, and not all the barbicans had as yet crumbled away), we came out in the fields, and after about a hundred paces along a stone wall, stopped at a narrow gate. Gagin opened it and led us up the hill by a steep footpath. Vines grew on terraces on both sides of the path. The sun had just set, and a faint red light still hung about the green vines on their high stakes, about the dry earth thickly covered with large and small bits of freestone, and about the white walls of the small house, with its sloping black beams and four bright windows, that stood at the very top of the hill up which we were climbing.

'This is our abode!' cried Gagin, as we approached the house, 'and there's the landlady bringing our



junket. *Guten Abend, Madame.* We shall sit down to supper directly; but first,' he added, 'just look round. What do you say to the view?'

The view was indeed splendid. The silver Rhine lay at our feet between its green banks. In one place it glowed ruddy in the golden sunset. You could see all the streets and houses of the little town that nestled on its bank, and beyond there was a wide stretch of fields and hills. It was fine below, but finer still above. What chiefly struck me was the clearness and depth of the sky, the lightness and transparency of the air. Fresh and light, it seemed to toss and roll around you as though it too felt more free at that height.

'You have chosen a splendid lodging,' I said.

'Asya found it,' answered Gagin. 'Well, Asya,' he continued, 'give your orders; have the things brought out and we will sup in the open air. We can hear the music there. Have you ever noticed,' he went on, turning to me, 'that often a waltz when heard near is worthless—just coarse, mean sounds; but heard at a distance it is wonderful? It arouses all your romantic feelings.'

Asya (her real name was Anna, but Gagin called her Asya, so you must permit me to do so too) in the meantime had gone into the house, and soon reappeared with the landlady. Together they were carrying a large tray with a pot of junket, plates, spoons, sugar, strawberries, and bread. We sat down and began supper. Asya took off her hat; her black hair, which was cut short and combed like a boy's, fell in thick curly locks on her neck and ears. At first she was shy of me, but Gagin said to her, 'Asya, what are you afraid of? he doesn't bite!'

She smiled, and a little later began to talk to me. I had never seen a more restless creature. She did not sit still for a moment; often she got up, ran into the house, and came back again, or sang in an undertone; often she laughed, and in the strangest way too: she seemed to laugh, not at what she heard, but at all



sorts of thoughts that came into her head. She looked straight in your eyes brightly and boldly, but at times her eyelids slightly drooped, and then her glance instantly became deep and tender.

We chatted for more than two hours. The day had long faded away, and the evening, at first all fiery, then bright and ruby-red, then pale and dim, had quietly melted away and sunk into night, and still our conversation went on, peaceful, quiet as the air that surrounded us. Gagin ordered a bottle of Rhine wine, which we drank without hurrying. The music continued to float across to us, with sounds that seemed even more sweet and tender than before; lights appeared in the town and on the river. Suddenly Asya's head sank down, so that her curls covered her eyes; she became silent, and sighed; presently she told us she was sleepy and went into the house; I saw, however, that she did not light a candle but stood for a long time at the unopened window. At last the moon rose and played upon the Rhine. Everything grew bright or dark, or changed; even the wine in our cut-glass tumblers glistened with a mysterious brilliancy. The wind fell, as if it had closed its wings, and died away. The sweet-scented warmth of night rose gently from the earth.

'It's time to go,' said I, 'or perhaps I may not be able to find a ferryman.'

'Yes, it is time,' repeated Gagin.

We went down by the footpath. Suddenly some pebbles came rolling down after us. It was Asya trying to catch us up.

'Aren't you asleep yet?' asked her brother, but she did not answer him, and ran past us. The last dying lamps, lighted by the students in the inn garden, illuminated the leaves from below and gave them a festive and fantastic look. We found Asya on the river bank: she was talking to the ferryman. I took leave of my new friends and jumped into the boat. Gagin promised to come and see me next day; I pressed his hand, and stretched my hand towards

Asya, but she only looked at me and bowed her head. The boat left its moorings and floated down the rapid current. The stalwart old ferryman bent to his oars and dipped them into the dark water.

'You are in the streak of moonlight and have broken it,' Asya cried after me.

I looked down; all round the boat the dark waves were dancing.

'Good-bye!' once more I heard her voice.

'Till to-morrow!' Gagin called after me.

The boat brought to, and I jumped out and looked across. Nobody could be seen on the opposite bank. The streak of moonlight stretched again like a golden bridge right across the river. Evidently as a finale the quick time of an old waltz of Lanner's was wafted across. Gagin was right: I felt that all the chords of my heart vibrated in answer to that insinuating melody. I started on my way home through the dark fields slowly inhaling the scented air, and arrived at my little room still affected by the voluptuous languor of objectless and endless expectations. I felt I was happy. But why was I happy? I did not want anything. I did not think of anything. . . . I was happy.

Almost laughing from the abundance of pleasant and lively feelings, I plunged into bed and had already closed my eyes, when I suddenly remembered that not once that whole evening had I thought of my cruel beauty. 'What is the meaning of this?' I asked myself; 'am I not in love?' But having asked myself this question, I think I fell asleep at once, like a child in its cot.

### III

The next morning (I was already awake, but not out of bed) I heard the sound of a stick knocking beneath my window, and a voice that I at once recognised as Gagin's sang out:

'Sleepest thou? My guitar  
Shall awake thee. . . .'



I hastened to open the door for him.

'How do you do?' said Gagin as he came in; 'I have disturbed you early, but look what a morning it is. Fresh and dewy, and the larks are singing.'

With his curly, shining hair, his bare neck, and his rosy cheeks, he himself was as fresh as the morning.

I dressed, and we went into the garden, sat down on a bench, ordered coffee, and began to talk. Gagin told me of his plans for the future; having a considerable fortune and not being dependent on anyone, he intended to devote himself to painting, and only regretted that he had thought of it too late, and had wasted so much time to no purpose. I told him my plans too, and confided to him my unhappy love affair. He listened to me with indulgence, but as far as I could see I had not aroused in him any great sympathy with my passion. Out of politeness he echoed my sighs once or twice, and then he proposed that I should accompany him home and look at his sketches. I agreed at once.

We did not find Asya in; the landlady told us she had gone to the ruins. (About two versts from the town of L—— are the ruins of a feudal castle.) Gagin showed me all his drawings. In his sketches there was much life and truth, something free and broad, but not one of them was finished, and the drawing appeared to me careless and incorrect. I told him my opinion quite frankly.

'Yes, yes,' he said with a sigh; 'you are right; all this is very bad and crude, but what's to be done? I never learned properly, and the damned Slav looseness always gets the upper hand. While you think of work you soar like an eagle, you could move the earth from its place, but in the execution you get weak and tired at once.'

I tried to encourage him, but he merely waved his hand, and collecting all his drawings, threw them on the sofa.

'If I have only enough patience, something may come of me,' he muttered through his teeth; 'if I

haven't, I shall remain an immature, aristocratic dilettante. Let's go and look for Asya.'

We went.

#### IV

The road to the ruins led up a narrow, wooded valley. At the bottom of the valley a little brook leapt noisily over the stones as if in haste to reach the big river that shone calmly beyond the dark boundaries of the steep cliffs and mountain ridges. Gagin drew my attention to some happily lighted spots, and his words sounded, if not like those of a painter, at least like those of an artist. The ruins soon came in sight. On the summit of a naked rock rose a four-cornered tower quite black with age, but still strong, though apparently cleft in two by a longitudinal crack. Moss-grown walls joined on to the tower, and here and there ivy crept over its sides. Crooked trees hung from the grey battlements and crumbling vaults. A stony path led to the gate, which was still standing. We were just approaching it when suddenly we saw, in front of us, a woman's figure that hurried over a heap of ruins and mounted on a projection of the walls just over a precipice.

'Surely that's Asya!' cried Gagin. 'What a mad girl!'

We passed through the gateway and found ourselves in a small courtyard, which was half overgrown with wild apple-trees and nettles. At the edge of the precipice sat Asya. She looked at us and laughed, but did not move from her place. Gagin shook his finger at her, and I reproached her loudly for her imprudence.

'Stop,' said Gagin in a whisper; 'don't irritate her. You don't know her; she is capable of going to the top of the tower. Look here, you had better admire the intelligence of the people of this place.'

I looked round. Sheltered in a corner of a tiny wooden booth sat an old woman knitting a stocking.



who squinted at us through her spectacles. She sold beer, ginger-bread, and mineral waters to tourists. We sat down on a bench and had some rather cold beer in heavy pewter mugs. Asya continued to sit motionless in the same place, her legs curled under her and her head wrapped in her scarf; her regular features were sharply and prettily marked against the clear sky, but I watched her with unfriendly feelings. Already the night before I had remarked in her something forced and not quite natural. 'She wants to astonish us,' I thought. 'What can her object be? What childish pranks!' As if guessing my thoughts, she suddenly cast a rapid and piercing glance at me, laughed again, and in two leaps jumped off the wall, went up to the old woman, and asked her for a glass of water.

'You think I want it to drink?' she said, turning to her brother; 'no, there are some flowers growing on the walls that must be watered.'

Gagin did not answer her, and she began to climb about the ruins with the glass in her hand, stopping occasionally to bend down and with the most amusing importance pour a few drops of water, that sparkled in the brilliant sunshine, on the shrivelling plants. Her movements were very pretty, but as before I was vexed with her, although involuntarily I admired her lightness and agility. At one dangerous place she shrieked to frighten us and then began to laugh. I was still more annoyed.

'She jumps about like a goat,' mumbled the old woman, who had looked up for a moment from her stocking.

At length Asya emptied her tumbler, and roguishly swinging from side to side, she returned to us. A strange smile played about her brows, nostrils, and lips, her dark eyes twinkled half audaciously, half merrily.

'You consider my conduct improper,' her expression seemed to say, 'all the same I know that you admire me.'

'Skilful, Asya, very skilful,' muttered Gagin half-audibly.

She seemed suddenly to be ashamed of herself, drooped her long eyelashes, and sat down modestly near us, as if feeling guilty. For the first time now I was able to examine her face; it was the most changeable face I had ever seen. A few moments later she grew pale, and assumed a concentrated, almost sad look; her features appeared to me larger, more severe, and simpler. She became quite quiet. We went round the ruins, Asya following us, and admired the views. By this time the dinner-hour was near. Gagin settled with the old woman and asked for another glass of beer. As he raised it to his lips he turned to me, and said, with a knowing wink:

'To the health of the lady of your heart!'

'But has he—have you such a lady?' asked Asya.

'Who has not?' replied Gagin.

Asya grew thoughtful; her expression again changed, and became challenging, almost insolent.

On the way back she laughed and played more than ever. She broke a long branch from a tree, put it over her shoulder like a gun, and tied her head up in her scarf; I remember that we met a large family of light-haired and affected English people; they all, as if at a command, turned their glassy eyes on Asya with cold astonishment, and she, as though to spite them, began singing loudly. When we arrived home she went at once to her room and only appeared again just in time for dinner, dressed in her best frock, tightly laced, with carefully arranged hair, and gloves on her hands. At table she behaved very correctly, one might even say affectedly; she hardly touched her food and drank water out of a wine-glass. She wanted to play a new part for my benefit, the part of the very correct and well-brought-up young lady. Gagin did not interfere. He was evidently used to giving in on every point. Only from time to time he looked at me good-humouredly and



slightly shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: 'She's a child, be indulgent!' As soon as dinner was over Asya got up, made us a curtsy, put on her hat, and asked Gagin if she might go to Frau Louise.

'Since when have you begun asking my permission?' he answered, with his unchangeable, but this time rather confused, smile; 'do you find it dull with us?'

'No, I promised Frau Louise yesterday that I would go to see her; besides, I think you two will prefer to be alone. Mr N——,' and she pointed to me, 'will again tell you some secrets.'

She went away.

'Frau Louise,' began Gagin, trying to avoid my eye, 'is the widow of a former burgomaster of this town, a very good but simple old woman. She has grown very fond of Asya. Asya has a passion for making acquaintance with people in a lower station of life. I have noticed that the reason for this is always pride. As you see, she is very much spoiled by me, but,' he added after a short silence, 'what would you have me do? I can't be exacting with anyone, and with her least of all. I am bound to be considerate towards her.'

I remained silent. Gagin changed the subject. The longer I knew him, the more I became attached to him. I soon began to understand him. His was a true Russian nature, truthful, honest, and simple, but unfortunately a little slack, and without tenacity or inner fire. Youth did not bubble up in him like a spring: it shone with a quiet light. He was very charming and clever, but I could not imagine what he would be like when he grew older. Would he ever become an artist? Without constant, strenuous work you cannot become an artist. 'And to work,' thought I, when I looked at his soft features or listened to his deliberate speech, 'no, you will never take the trouble, you will never be able to concentrate your powers.' But not to like him was impossible, your heart was drawn towards him. We spent about

four hours together, sometimes sitting on the sofa, sometimes slowly walking up and down before the house, and in these four hours we became very intimate.

The sun set, and it was time for me to go home, but still Asya had not returned.

'How independent she is!' murmured Gagin; 'if you like I will see you home, and on the way we may turn in at Frau Louise's. I will ask if she's there. It's not much out of the way.'

We went down to the town, turned into a narrow crooked lane, and stopped before a house not wide enough for more than two windows, but four stories high; the second story projected over the street farther than the first, and the third and fourth farther than the second. The whole house, with its old wood-carvings, its two thick pillars below the pointed and tiled roof, its crane, that stuck out from the attic like a beak, had the appearance of a huge, crouching bird.

'Asya!' cried Gagin, 'are you there?'

The lighted window in the third story opened and Asya's dark head looked out. Behind her the toothless and almost blind face of an old German woman peeped out too.

'I'm here,' cried Asya, leaning on the window-sill with the air of a coquette: 'I am very happy here. That's for you, catch it,' she added, and threw Gagin a geranium flower; 'imagine that I am the lady of your heart.'

Frau Louise laughed.

'N—— is going home,' cried Gagin, 'and wants to take leave of you.'

'Really?' murmured Asya. 'In that case give him my flower, and I will return home at once.'

She slammed the window to and I think kissed Frau Louise. Gagin handed me the flower in silence; I put it in my pocket also in silence, went to the ferry, and was taken across.

I remember I walked home not thinking of anything,



but with a strange heaviness on my heart, when suddenly I was astonished by a strong scent, familiar enough, but one seldom met with in Germany. I stopped, and saw near the road a small patch of hemp. This scent, so common in the steppes, reminded me of my native land and aroused in my heart a great longing to be there. I wanted to breathe Russian air, to walk on Russian soil. 'What am I doing here? why do I wander about a strange land? among strange people?' I cried. The dead weight that I felt in my heart turned suddenly into a bitter, burning agitation. I reached home in a frame of mind quite different from that of the day before. I felt angry and for a long time could not calm myself. At last I sat down, and remembering my artful widow (I always ended each day with thoughts of that lady), took out one of her letters, but I did not so much as open it, for my thoughts took quite another turn. I began to think . . . to think of Asya. It occurred to me that Gagin had hinted in our conversation at some sort of obstacle that prevented his return to Russia. 'Oh, come, is she his sister?' I said aloud.

I undressed, lay down, and tried to sleep, but an hour later I was again sitting on my bed, leaning my elbows on the pillow thinking of that 'capricious girl with the affected laugh.' 'She is like Raphael's little Galatea in the Farnese Palace,' I murmured. 'Yes, and she is not his sister. . . .'

The widow's letter lay quietly on the floor gleaming white in the moon-beams.



The next morning I again went to L——. I assured myself that I wanted to see Gagin, but secretly I was drawn there by the wish to see what Asya would do, and if she would behave as oddly as the day before. I found them both in the drawing-

room, and strange to say—was it because I had thought so much about Russia the night before and the whole morning?—Asya now appeared to me to be a real Russian girl, even a common girl—almost like a maid-servant. She wore a little old frock, her hair was brushed back behind her ears, and she sat quietly at the window and worked at her embroidery frame with a modest and gentle air, as if she had never done anything else in her life. She hardly spoke a word, but looked steadily at her work, and her features assumed such an ordinary, everyday expression that involuntarily I remembered our home-bred Katias and Mashas. To complete the resemblance she began to sing under her breath '*Mátushka golúbushka.*'<sup>1</sup> I looked at her sallow, inanimate face and remembered my last night's thoughts, and something made me feel sad.

The weather was splendid. Gagin told us he was going to sketch from nature, and I asked if he would allow me to accompany him, or whether it would disturb him.

'On the contrary,' he answered, 'you will be able to give me good advice.'

He put on a large Van Dyck hat and blouse, took his sketch-book under his arm, and started off, I following in his wake. Asya stayed at home. As he left the house Gagin asked her to see that the soup was not too thin, and Asya promised to look in at the kitchen. Gagin went to a little valley that was already familiar to me, sat down on a stone, and began to paint a hollow old oak with wide-spreading branches. I lay down on the grass and took out a book. I did not read two pages and he only dirtied his paper, but we talked and discussed, and (as far as I am able to judge) discussed very cleverly and subtly the question of how one ought to work, what ought to be avoided, what rules ought to be followed, and what the real significance of the artist is in our century. At last Gagin declared

<sup>1</sup> 'Mother, darling,' a popular Russian folk-song.



that he was 'not in good form to-day,' and lay down beside me. Then our youthful talk flowed on without any hindrance, now ardent, now meditative, now rapturous, but almost always in the obscure speeches in which we Russians love to overflow. When we had talked to our hearts' content, and were filled with a feeling of satisfaction at having done something, at having succeeded in something, we returned home. I found Asya just the same as I had left her; however closely I observed her I could not find in her a shadow of coquetry nor a sign of a purposely assumed part. This time it was impossible to accuse her of being unnatural.

'Ah, ah!' said Gagin, 'she has imposed fasting and penance on herself.'

In the evening she yawned several times without trying to hide it and went early to bed. I also took an early leave of Gagin and returned home, thinking of nothing in particular; that day passed in sober feelings. The only thing I can remember is that when I lay down to sleep I murmured to myself, 'What a chameleon that girl is!' and after some reflection added—'But all the same she is not his sister.'

## VI

In this way a fortnight passed, and I visited the Gagins every day. Asya evidently avoided me, but never once allowed herself to play any of the tricks that had so surprised me during the first two days of our acquaintance. She seemed to be secretly mortified or excited; she even laughed less. I watched her with curiosity.

She could speak both French and German fairly well, but everything showed that since her childhood she had not been in female hands, and that she had received a strange, an unusual, education which had nothing in common with Gagin's. Notwithstanding his hat *à la* Van Dyck and his blouse, there seemed

to exhale from him the soft, almost effeminate odour of the great Russian nobleman, while she was not like a lady; there was a certain uneasiness in all her movements—that wild rose had only lately been ingrafted, that wine was still fermenting. By nature modest and shy, she was vexed at her own bashfulness, and out of sheer vexation tried to be free and bold, not always with success. Several times I tried to talk to her about her life in Russia, about her past, but she answered my questions unwillingly; I found out, however, that for a long time before coming abroad she had lived in the country. I once caught her reading a book. She was sitting, her head on her hands and her fingers deep in her hair, devouring the page with her eyes.

‘Bravo!’ said I, coming up to her. ‘How industrious you are!’

She lifted her head gravely and looked severely at me.

‘You think I can only laugh,’ she murmured, and wanted to go away.

I looked at the title of her book—it was a French novel.

‘Anyhow, I can’t approve of your choice,’ I remarked.

‘What is one to read?’ she cried, and throwing the book on the table added, ‘Then I had better go and play the fool,’ and ran into the garden.

That same evening I read *Hermann and Dorothea* aloud to Gagin. At first Asya only flitted quickly round us, but suddenly she stopped and lent an ear, and then quietly sat down near me and listened to the end of the reading. The next day I again could not recognize her, and at first it did not occur to me that it had entered her head to be domesticated and sedate, like Dorothea. In a word, she appeared to me an enigmatical creature. Vain and self-conscious in the extreme, she still attracted me even when I was vexed by her. Of one thing I became more and more convinced—that she was not Gagin’s sister. He did not



treat her at all as a brother would, too caressingly, too considerately, and at the same time, in a somewhat constrained manner.

A strange chance confirmed my suspicions. One evening when I came to the vineyard where the Gugins lived I found the little gate locked. Without losing time in deliberation I went to a part of the wall I had previously noticed to be partially broken down and jumped over it. Not far from there and away from the road there was a small summer-house overgrown with acacia. I had just reached it, and was on the point of going further when I was surprised to hear Asya's voice saying excitedly between her sobs, 'No, I don't want to love anybody but you, no! no! I only want to love you—and for ever!'

'Enough, Asya, be calm!' said Gagin. 'You know I believe you.'

Their voices came from the summer-house. I could see them both through the scanty trellis of the branches, but they did not see me.

'Yes, you, only you!' she repeated, throwing her arms around his neck, and with convulsive sobs she began to kiss him and cling close to his breast.

'Enough, enough!' he repeated, and passed his hand lightly over her hair.

For some moments I remained motionless. Then I started. Should I go to them? 'Not for the world!' shot through my brain. With rapid steps I returned to the wall, jumped over into the road, and started, almost at a run, for home. I smiled and rubbed my hands, delighted with the chance that had confirmed my conjectures (not for a moment did I doubt that they were correct), but at the same time I felt a bitterness in my heart. 'They certainly know how to pretend,' I thought. 'But why? What's their object in deceiving me? I did not expect this from him. . . . What a touching explanation!'

## VII

I slept badly and rose early next morning. Strapping my knapsack on my back, I told my landlady that she need not expect me that night and started on foot for the hills, going up the stream on which lay the little town of Z—. These hills, an offshoot of the mountain range called the Dog's Back (Hunds-rück), are very interesting from a geological point of view. They are especially remarkable for the regularity and pureness of their basalt strata. But I was not interested in these geological formations; I could not explain to myself what was going on within me. One feeling was clear to me—unwillingness to meet the Gugins. I persuaded myself that the only reason for my sudden dislike of them was vexation at their duplicity. What had obliged them to pretend to be brother and sister? I tried not to think of them, wandered leisurely about the hills and the valleys, sat in the village inns, chatted peacefully with the inn-keepers and the guests, or lay on a flat warm stone watching the clouds floating by: fortunately it was wonderful weather. I spent three days thus, and not without pleasure, although at times my heart was heavy. My frame of mind was quite in accordance with the peace of those parts.

I gave myself up entirely to the quiet play of chance impressions: ever changing, they slowly succeeded each other in my soul and left on it at last only one general sensation in which was blended all I saw, felt, and heard in those three days—all: the delicate scent of the resin in the forests, the cry and tapping of the woodpecker, the unceasing prattle of the clear little streams, the spotted trout swimming over their sandy bottoms, the dim outlines of the hills, the gloomy rocks, the clean little villages with their venerable, ancient churches and old trees, the storks in the meadows, the snug mills with rapid-turning wheels, the cordial faces of the peasants in their blue



smocks and grey stockings, the slow, squeaking wagons drawn by fat horses or sometimes cows, the long-haired youths walking along the clean roads planted on both sides with apple and pear trees. . . .

Even now it is pleasant for me to recall the impressions of those days. I greet thee, humble corner of the German land, with thy ingenuous content, thy signs on all sides of the work of industrious hands, patient if unhurried work—I greet thee and wish thee peace.

I arrived home at the end of the third day. I forgot to say that owing to my vexation with the Gugins I had tried to revive in my mind the image of the cruel-hearted widow, but my efforts were vain. I remember once, when I tried to think of her, I saw before me a little five-year-old peasant girl with a round face and large staring eyes. She gazed at me with such an innocent, childish look I was ashamed to meet her pure eyes; I did not want to lie in her presence, and at that moment took leave of the former object of my affections finally and for ever.

When I came home I found a note from Gugin. He was surprised at the suddenness of my decision, reproached me for not having taken him with me, and asked me to come to them as soon as I got back. I read this letter with displeasure, but the next day went to L—.

### VIII

Gugin met me in the most friendly manner and showered all sorts of flattering reproaches on me. But Asya, as if on purpose, began to laugh without any cause when she saw me, and ran away as she often did. Gugin looked vexed; he muttered after her that she was mad, and begged me to excuse her. I must confess I began to feel very much annoyed with Asya. I was already not feeling quite myself, and now again I was met with this unnatural laughter, these strange grimaces. However, I tried to appear

to have noticed nothing, and communicated to Gagin some of the details of my little trip. He told me what he had been doing in my absence, but the conversation flagged. Asya came into the room and ran away again. At last I said I had some important work to do and must return to my rooms. Gagin at first tried to persuade me to stay, but after looking fixedly at me offered to accompany me. In the anteroom Asya suddenly came up to me and held out her hand; I lightly pressed her fingers, but scarcely bowed to her. Gagin and I crossed the Rhine, and when we got to my favourite place under the great ash-tree with the statue of the Madonna we sat down on the bench to enjoy the view. There we had a remarkable conversation.

We began by exchanging a few words, and then were silent again and looked at the shining river.

'Tell me,' said Gagin suddenly, with his usual smile, 'what is your opinion of Asya? Does she not appear rather strange to you?'

'Yes,' I answered, not without a little surprise. I had not expected him to begin talking about her.

'You must know her well before you can judge her,' he said. 'She has a very good heart, but an unmanageable head. It is difficult to get on with her. But she can't be blamed, if you only knew her story——'

'Her story?' I interrupted; 'is she not your ——?'

Gagin glanced at me.

'You perhaps think she is not my sister? No,' he continued, taking no notice of my confusion, 'she really is my sister, she is my father's daughter. Listen then, I can trust you and will tell you everything.

'My father was a good, clever, and well-educated man, but unhappy. Fate treated him no worse than many others, but he could not even bear her first blow. He married early for love. His wife, my mother, died very soon—I was only six months old when she died. My father took me away to the



country, and for over twelve years he never left the estate. He occupied himself with my education, and would never have parted from me had it not been for my uncle, his brother, who came to visit us in the country. This uncle always lived in Petersburg, and held a very prominent position there. He persuaded my father to entrust me to him, for my father would on no account consent to leave the country. My uncle represented to him that for a boy of my age it was bad to live in entire isolation, that with such a dejected and silent teacher as my father was, I would certainly be behind other boys of my age and position, and even my character might be spoiled. For a long time my father would not listen to my uncle's exhortations, but at last he gave in. I cried when I had to leave my father; I loved him though I had never seen a smile on his face, but when I once got to Petersburg I soon forgot our gloomy and joyless home. I went to a Cadet School and then entered a Guards regiment. Every year I returned to our estate for a few weeks, and every year I found my father more and more mournful, more wrapped up in himself and pensive to timidity. He went to church every day and had almost forgotten how to talk. On one of my visits home (I was about twenty then) I saw in our house for the first time a thin, black-eyed little girl of ten—Asya. My father said she was an orphan whom he had taken out of charity—that is how he explained matters. I did not pay much attention to her; she was shy, quick, and silent like a little animal, and whenever I came into my father's favourite room, a huge dark room where my mother had died and where even in the daytime you had to have candles, she would at once hide behind his Voltaire chair or a bookcase.

'It happened that during the next three or four years my military duties prevented my going to our estate. Every month I received a short letter from my father, but he seldom mentioned Asya, and only

cursorily when he did at all. He was over fifty but still looked a young man. You can imagine my alarm when suddenly, being quite unprepared, I got a letter from our bailiff, in which he informed me that my father was dying, and implored me to come at once if I wished to take leave of him. I rushed off as quickly as I could, and found my father still alive but almost at his last breath. He was very pleased to see me, embraced me with his thin arms and gazed long in my eyes with a look full of inquiry and entreaty. Making me promise to fulfil his last request, he ordered his old valet to call Asya. The old man brought her in; she was hardly able to stand, and trembled in every limb.

"Here," said my father, speaking with difficulty, "I bequeath you my daughter—your sister. You will learn all from Yakov," he added, pointing to the valet.

Asya burst into sobs and fell on the bed. Half an hour later my father died.

"This is what I learned: Asya was the daughter of my father and my mother's former maid, Tatyana. I can vividly remember Tatyana. I remember her tall graceful figure, her beautiful serious face, her large dark eyes. She was considered a proud and unapproachable girl. As far as I could gather from Yakov's respectful omissions my father's connexion with her had begun several years after my mother's death. At that time Tatyana lived no longer in the master's house but in a little cottage with her married sister, our dairy-maid. My father became very attached to her, and after my departure from the estate he even wanted to marry her, but, despite all his entreaties, she would not consent to become his wife.

"The late Tatyana Vasil'evna," Yakov continued, standing by the door with his hands behind his back, "was a sensible woman and did not want to do anything to your father's disadvantage. 'What sort of a wife would I be to you? What sort of a lady



am I?'—that's how she spoke, in my presence, sir."

'Tatyana did not want even to move into our house, and continued to live with Asya at her sister's. In my childhood I only remember to have seen Tatyana at church on Holy days. With a dark kerchief on her head and a yellow shawl over her shoulders, she would take her place in the crowd near the window, her severe profile clearly seen against the light of the window; she prayed quietly but with dignity, bowing low in the old-fashioned manner. When my uncle took me away, Asya was only just two, and when she was about nine she lost her mother.

'As soon as Tatyana died my father took Asya into the house. He had expressed a wish to do so even before, but Tatyana refused him this too. You can imagine Asya's feelings when she was taken to the master's house. To this day she cannot forget the moment when she first had a silk dress on, and when her hand was first kissed. As long as her mother was alive she had been brought up very strictly; at my father's she enjoyed complete liberty. He was her teacher, she never saw anybody but him. He did not spoil her, that is to say, he did not coddle her, but he loved her passionately and never denied her anything: in his soul he felt guilty towards her. Asya soon understood that she was the most important person in the house; she knew that the master was her father; but soon she also understood her own false position. Self-love grew strong in her, mistrustfulness as well; bad habits took root and simplicity disappeared. She wanted, she once confessed to me, to make the whole world forget her origin; she was ashamed of her mother, and, at the same time, ashamed of being ashamed and proud of her too. You see she knew, and knows now, much that she ought not to know at her age. But is she to blame? Her young strength developed, her blood boiled, and there was no hand near to guide her. She

had perfect independence in everything—was that easy to bear? She wanted to be no worse than other young ladies. She threw herself into books. What good could come of it all? Her life began irregularly and continued to be irregular, but her heart was not spoiled, her intelligence survived.

‘In this way I, a young man of twenty, found myself with a girl of thirteen on my hands. For some days after my father’s death the very sound of my voice caused her to tremble, my caresses made her sad, and it was only little by little that she gradually became accustomed to me. It is true that afterwards, when she was convinced that I really accepted her as a sister and loved her as one, she became passionately attached to me: she has no feelings that stop half-way.

‘I took her to Petersburg with me. Though it was painful for me to have to part from her—I could not have her with me always—I placed her in one of the best schools. Asya understood the necessity of our separation, but began by falling ill, and nearly died. Afterwards she became more patient and spent four years in the boarding-school, but, contrary to my expectations, remained nearly the same as she had been before. The head-mistress often complained to me about her. “It is impossible to punish her,” she said, “and she does not yield to kindness.” Asya was very quick and learned very well, better than any of the other girls; but would never submit to discipline, was obstinate, looked unsociable. . . . I could not blame her; in her position she had to be either subservient or sullen. Of all her school companions she only became intimate with one, a poor, ugly, persecuted girl. The others with whom she was brought up were mostly of good family; they did not like her, jeered at her, and stung her to the quick whenever they could; Asya did not give in to them by a hair’s-breadth. Once during the Scripture lesson the teacher spoke about vice: “Flattery and cowardice are the worst vices.” said



Asya quite loud. In short, she continued to go her own way; only her manners improved, though even in this respect I fear she did not make much progress.

'At last she reached her seventeenth year, she could remain at school no longer. I found myself in a very embarrassing position. Suddenly I had a happy idea, to leave the service, go abroad for a year or two, and take Asya with me. I had hardly thought of the idea before it was done—and here we are on the banks of the Rhine, where I am trying to occupy myself with painting, and she . . . plays her games and behaves as oddly as ever. Now I hope you will not judge her too severely; for though she pretends not to care, she really sets great store by the opinion of everyone, and yours especially.'

Gagin again smiled his quiet smile, and I pressed his hand warmly.

'That's how it is,' continued Gagin, 'but I have a bad time with her. She's like gunpowder. So far nobody has interested her, but there will be trouble if she falls in love! Sometimes I don't know what to do with her. What do you think she did the other day?—she suddenly told me that I was colder to her than I used to be, that she only loved me, and would never love anybody but me, and then she began to cry so bitterly!'

'So that's it,' I murmured, and bit my tongue.

'But tell me,' I asked Gagin (we had become quite confidential), 'is it possible that she has never seen anyone who has taken her fancy? In Petersburg she must have met young men?'

'None of them ever pleased her. No, Asya requires a hero, an uncommon man—or a picturesque shepherd in some mountain valley. But I am detaining you with my chatter,' he added, rising.

'Not at all,' said I; 'let us go to your house, I don't want to go home.'

'And your work?'

I did not answer. Gagin smiled good-humouredly,

and we returned to L——. When I saw the vineyard and the white house at the top of the hill, I felt a sort of sweetness—yes, a sweetness—in my heart, as if honey had been secretly poured into it. I was light-hearted after Gagin's story.

## IX

Asya met us at the door of the house. I expected to be greeted with laughter again, but she came towards us looking pale and silent and with downcast eyes.

'Here he is again,' began Gagin, 'and take note, please, that it was he who wanted to return.'

Asya looked questioningly at me. I in my turn held out my hand to her, and this time gave her cold little fingers a hard pressure. I was very sorry for her; I could now understand much in her that had only puzzled me before, her inward restlessness, her inability to control herself, her desire to 'show off'—all were clear to me now. I could see into this soul—a secret weight pressed always on her. Her inexperienced self-love struggled restlessly and in confusion, but her whole being was striving towards the truth. I understood why this strange girl attracted me; it was not only the almost wild beauty spread over her whole delicate body that attracted me, it was her soul, too, that interested me.

Gagin began to rummage among his drawings. I proposed to Asya that we should take a stroll in the vineyard. She at once agreed, with glad, almost submissive readiness. We went half-way down the hill and sat down on a broad flagstone.

'Were you not dull without us?' began Asya.

'And were you dull without me?' I asked.

Asya looked at me out of the corner of her eye.

'Yes,' she answered. 'Was it nice in the mountains?' she continued at once; 'are they high? Higher than the clouds? Tell me what you saw. You told my brother, but I did not hear anything.'



'Why did you go away?' I remarked.

'I went away . . . because . . . I will not go away now,' she added with a trustful, caressing voice. 'You were cross to-day.'

'I was cross?'

'Yes, you.'

'What makes you think so?'

'I don't know, but you were cross, and went away cross. I was very vexed that you left in that way, and I am very pleased that you have returned.'

'I too am glad that I returned,' I murmured.

Asya slightly shrugged her shoulders, as children often do when they are pleased.

'Oh, I am good at guessing!' she continued. 'I used to know, even by papa's cough when I was in the next room, if he was pleased with me or not.'

Until that day Asya had never once mentioned her father to me, and it surprised me.

'Did you love your father?' I asked, and to my great vexation felt I was blushing.

She did not answer, but grew red too. We were both silent. On the Rhine far below us a steamer hurried past, leaving a trail of smoke. We both looked at it.

'Why don't you tell me something?' whispered Asya.

'Why did you laugh to-day as soon as you saw me?' I asked.

'I don't know. Sometimes I want to cry but laugh instead. You must not judge me by what I do. By the by, what is that legend about Lorelei? Isn't that her rock, that one we can see? They say she used to drown everyone till she fell in love, and then she threw herself into the water. I like that legend. Frau Louise tells me all sorts of stories. Frau Louise has a black cat with yellow eyes. . . .'

Asya looked up and shook her curls.

'Ah! I am happy,' she said.

At that moment strange broken sounds reached our ears. Hundreds of voices with measured pauses

were singing a hymn in unison. There was a crowd of pilgrims with crosses and banners passing along the road below us.

'Oh, if we could go with them!' said Asya, listening to the sound of the voices gradually dying away.

'Are you so religious?'

'If one could only go far away to pray, to do some great deed——' she continued. 'The days pass, life slips away, and what have we done?'

'You are ambitious,' I remarked. 'You want to live to some purpose, to leave some mark behind you.'

'And is that impossible?'

'Impossible!' I almost replied, but looking into her bright eyes I only murmured 'Try!'

'Tell me,' said Asya, after a short pause, during which a sort of shadow seemed to pass over her face, now grown pale, 'do you like that lady very much? You remember, my brother drank her health in the ruins on the second day of our acquaintance.'

I laughed. 'Your brother was joking. I never cared for a single lady; at any rate, I don't care for one now.'

'What do you admire in women?' asked Asya with innocent curiosity, throwing back her head.

'What a strange question!' I exclaimed.

Asya became slightly confused. 'I ought not to have asked you such a question, ought I? Forgive me, I am accustomed to saying whatever comes into my head. That is why I am afraid to speak.'

'Please speak out—for God's sake don't be afraid,' I interrupted. 'I am so glad that you have at last ceased to be shy with me.'

Asya lowered her eyes and laughed a low, gentle laugh: I had never heard her laugh in that way.

'Well, tell me something,' she continued, arranging the folds of her dress and settling them round her legs as if she were preparing to sit there a long time—'tell me something, or read me something, as you remember you read to us out of *Onégin*.'



She fell into a reverie. . . .

‘Where are the cross and boughs that shade  
The grave where my poor mother’s laid?’

she said in an undertone.

‘It is not like that in Pushkin,’ I remarked.

‘I wish I were Tatyana,’ she continued in the same pensive tone. ‘Tell me something!’ she exclaimed vivaciously.

I was not in the humour for telling stories. I looked at her sitting there, bathed in the sunlight, calm and gentle. Everything shone joyously around us, below us, above us,—the sky, the earth, the water, even the air, seemed full of brilliancy.

‘Look, how beautiful it is!’ I said, involuntarily lowering my voice.

‘Yes, beautiful!’ she answered in an equally low voice without looking at me. ‘If you and I were birds, how we would soar, how we would fly! We would get drowned in this blue!—But we are not birds.’

‘But we might grow wings!’ I remarked.

‘How?’

‘Live a little longer and you will know. There are feelings that lift us above the earth. Do not trouble, you too will have wings.’

‘Have you had them?’

‘How am I to answer you? I don’t think I have flown yet.’

Asya again became pensive. I leaned a little towards her.

‘Can you waltz?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Yes, I can,’ I answered, somewhat puzzled.

‘Then come along, come along. I will ask my brother to play a waltz for us. We will imagine that we are flying, that our wings have grown!’

She ran into the house and I after her. A few minutes later we were moving round the narrow room to the sweet tones of a waltz by Lanner. Asya

waltzed beautifully and was quite carried away by the dance. Something soft and womanly seemed suddenly to appear on her severe, maidenly features. Long after, my arm felt the contact of her delicate figure; long after, I seemed to hear her rapid breathing close to my ear; long after, her half-closed, immoveable eyes and pale but animated features, surrounded by a wealth of curly hair, appeared before me as in a dream.

## X

That whole day passed in the most delightful manner. We amused ourselves like children: Asya was very charming and simple and Gagin was pleased when he looked at her. It was late when I left them. When we got to the middle of the Rhine I asked the ferryman to let the boat float down-stream. The old man lifted his oars out of the water and the current of the majestic river bore us along. Looking round, listening and remembering, I suddenly felt a secret uneasiness in my heart. I raised my eyes to the sky, but in the sky there was no peace—studded with stars, it seemed to move, to glisten, to tremble; I looked down at the river—here, too, in its dark, cold depths the stars glittered and trembled. There seemed to be an excited animation all around, and the excitement in my heart increased. I leaned over the side of the boat. The murmur of the breeze in my ears, the soft ripple of the water under the stern, excited me, and the fresh breath of the waves did not cool me. A nightingale broke into song on the bank and infected me with the sweet poison of its notes. Tears rose to my eyes, but they were not the tears of an aimless ecstasy. What I felt was not the vague sensation, but lately experienced, of an all-enfolding desire, when the soul expands and resounds and imagines that it understands all and loves all. No, the desire for happiness was kindled



within me. I did not dare as yet to call it by its right name, but it was happiness, happiness to satiety, that I wanted—that is what I pined for. . . . The boat continued to float down-stream, and the old ferryman sat dozing over his oars.

## XI

When I started for the Gugins the next day, I did not ask myself if I was in love with Asya, but I thought much about her. I was interested in her fate, I was glad of our unexpected acquaintance. I felt that it was only since the day before that I had got to know her: up to that time she had turned away from me. And now that she had at last unfolded herself to me, with what a captivating light her whole image was illuminated, how new it was to me, what secret enchantments modestly peeped out!

I went bravely along the familiar road, looking always at the little white house that could be seen in the distance. I did not think of the future—I did not even think of the next day; I was very happy.

Asya blushed when I entered the room; I noticed that she had again made herself smart, but the expression on her face was not in keeping with her dress. She was sad, and I had come feeling so merry! It appeared to me that she was preparing as usual to run away, but by making an effort forced herself to remain. Gugin was in that peculiar condition of artistic fury and ardour which suddenly attacks dilettanti like a fit when they imagine they have succeeded, as they say, 'in catching nature by the tail.' He stood before a canvas, dishevelled and dirtied all over with paint, boldly sweeping over it with his brush. He nodded to me almost fiercely, stepped back, half closed his eyes, and then again fell to work at his picture. I did not disturb him

but sat down near Asya. Her dark eyes slowly turned towards me.

'To-day you are not like what you were yesterday,' I said, after vain efforts to raise a smile to her lips.

'No, I am not the same,' she answered slowly and with a dull voice, 'but that does not matter. I did not sleep well; I was thinking all night.'

'What about?'

'Ah! many things. It is a habit I have had from my childhood, ever since the time when I lived with my mother. . . .' She pronounced this word with an effort, and then repeated it. 'When I lived with my mother . . . I thought: Why is it that nobody can know what is going to happen to him, and that sometimes you see misfortunes coming and you can't get away from them? and why is it that you can never tell the whole truth? Then I thought: I know nothing, I must learn. I must be re-educated, I have been very badly taught. I cannot play the piano, I cannot draw, I even sew badly. I have no abilities, it must be very dull to be with me.'

'You are unjust to yourself,' I answered. 'You have read much, you are cultured, and with your cleverness . . .'

'Am I clever?' she asked, with such naïve curiosity that I laughed involuntarily; but she did not even smile. 'Brother, am I clever?' she asked Gagin.

He did not answer, but went on with his work, lifting his arm high and constantly changing his brushes.

'Sometimes I do not know what is passing through my brain,' continued Asya, with the same meditative look. 'Sometimes I am afraid even of myself, God knows. Oh, how I wish to . . . ! Is it true that women ought not to read much?'

'It is not necessary, but——'

'Tell me, what ought I to read? Tell me, what ought I to do? I will do everything you tell me,' she added, turning to me with innocent trustfulness.



For the first instant I could not think of anything to say to her.

'You will not be dull with me?'

'How can you think so?'

'Oh, thank you!' replied Asya, 'I thought you would be dull.' And her hot little hand pressed mine tightly.

'N——!' cried Gagin at that moment, 'is this background too dark?'

I went up to him. Asya rose and went away.

## XII

She returned an hour later, and stopping in the doorway beckoned to me with her hand.

'Listen!' she said. 'If I were to die would you be sorry?'

'What strange thoughts you have to-day!' I exclaimed.

'I think I shall die soon; I sometimes fancy that everything around is taking leave of me. To die is better than to live thus. Oh! don't look at me like that; really I am not pretending. I shall be afraid of you again.'

'Were you afraid of me?'

'If I am so strange, I really am not to blame,' she said. 'Do you see, I can't even laugh . . .'

She continued to be sad and preoccupied until evening. Something was going on within her which I could not understand. Her eyes often rested on me; under that enigmatic gaze my heart throbbed gently. She seemed calm, but whenever I looked at her I always wanted to tell her not to be agitated. I admired her; I found a touching beauty in her pale features and in her undecided, halting movements. For some reason she imagined that I was in low spirits.

'Listen,' said she shortly before I took my leave. 'I am troubled with the idea that you think me

frivolous. In future always believe what I tell you, but be quite frank with me. I give you my word of honour, I will always tell you the truth.'

This 'word of honour' again made me laugh.

'Oh! don't laugh,' she said with animation, 'or I will say to you to-day what you said to me yesterday: "Why do you laugh?"' After a moment's pause she added, 'Do you remember what you said yesterday about wings? My wings have grown—but there's nowhere to fly.'

'Believe me,' I murmured, 'all ways are open to you. . . .'

Asya looked straight and earnestly in my eyes.

'To-day you have a bad opinion of me,' said she, frowning.

'I?—A bad opinion of you?'

'What's the matter? you are both so downcast!' Gagin broke in; 'shall I play you a waltz as I did yesterday?'

'No, no,' said Asya, wringing her hands, 'not for anything to-day!'

'I'm not forcing you; calm yourself.'

'Not for anything!' she repeated, and grew pale. . . .

'Is it possible that she loves me?' I thought as I approached the Rhine, while its dark waves rolled rapidly on.

### XIII

'Is it possible that she loves me?' I asked myself the next morning as soon as I was awake. I did not want to look into myself. I felt that her image, the image of 'the girl with the affected laugh,' had imprinted itself on my soul, and that I should not soon escape from it. I went to L—— and remained there the whole day, but only saw Asya for a few moments. She was not feeling well, she had a headache. She only came down for a moment. Her



head was bound up and she looked thin and pale; her eyes were almost shut. She smiled faintly and said, 'It will pass, it is nothing; everything passes—is it not true?' and went away. I felt dull. The world seemed sad and void. However, it was long before I made up my mind to go away, and I did not return home till late that night, without having seen her again.

The next morning passed in half-dreamy consciousness. I wanted to do some work, but could not; I wanted to do nothing, not even think—but that too was unsuccessful. I wandered about the town, came home, and again went out.

'Are you Mr N——?' a child's voice asked behind me. I looked round and saw a small boy standing before me. 'This is for you from Fräulein Annette,' he said, handing me a note.

I opened it and recognised Asya's irregular and rapid handwriting. 'I must see you without fail,' she wrote. 'Come to-day at four o'clock to the little stone chapel on the road near the ruins. To-day I have committed a great imprudence. Come, for God's sake! you shall know all. Only tell the messenger "yes."'

'Is there an answer?' asked the boy.

'Say it is "yes,"' I answered, and the boy ran away.

#### XIV

I returned to my room, sat down, and began to think. My heart beat quickly. I read Asya's letter several times. I looked at the clock; it was not yet twelve.

The door opened and Gagin entered.

His face was gloomy. He seized my hand and pressed it hard. He appeared to be much agitated.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

Gagin took a chair and sat down opposite me.

'Four days ago I surprised you with my story,'

he began, hesitatingly and with a forced smile, 'and to-day I will surprise you even more. With anyone else I should probably not have ventured to be so open. But you are a good fellow—you are my friend, aren't you? Listen to me: my sister Asya is in love with you!'

I started and got up.

'Your sister, you say . . .'

'Yes, yes,' Gagin broke in. 'I tell you she is mad, and will drive me mad. But fortunately she does not know how to lie—and she trusts me. Ah! what a soul that girl has . . . but she will ruin herself, she is sure to ruin herself!'

'You are mistaken,' I began.

'No, I am not mistaken. Yesterday, you know she had to lie up most of the day; she ate nothing, but she did not complain—she never does. I was not uneasy, although in the evening she was slightly feverish. Last night at about two o'clock I was awakened by our landlady: "Go to your sister," she said, "she seems ill." I ran to Asya and found her still dressed, with a high fever and in tears; her head burned, her teeth chattered. "What is it?" I said; "are you ill?" She threw herself on my neck and began to entreat me to take her away as soon as possible if I wished her to live. I could not understand at all and tried to calm her. Her sobs only increased, and at last through her tears I heard—in short, I heard that she is in love with you. I assure you that you and I, reasonable people, cannot even as much as imagine how deeply she feels or with what incredible force her emotions take hold of her. They come upon her as unexpectedly and as unavoidably as a thunder-storm. You are a very charming fellow,' he continued, 'but why she should love you to such an extent I must confess I cannot understand. She says she became attached to you at the first glance. That's why she wept the other day when she assured me she did not want to love anybody but me. She imagines that you look down



on her—that you probably know who she is. She asked me if I had told you her story. I, of course, said “no,” but she is awfully sharp. Now she has but one wish: she wants to go away, and at once. I sat with her until morning. She made me promise that to-morrow we should no longer be here, and not till then would she go to sleep. I thought and thought, and at last decided to speak to you. In my opinion Asya is right—the best thing we can do is to go away. I should have taken her away already to-day if a thought had not come into my head which stopped me. Perhaps—who knows?—my sister attracts you? If that is so, why should I take her away? At last I decided to put aside all false shame. . . . Besides, I have noticed one or two things . . . I decided to find out from you . . .’ Poor Gagin became quite confused. ‘Please forgive me,’ he added, ‘I am not used to such commotion.’

I took his hand.

‘You want to know if I like your sister?’ I said in a firm voice. ‘Yes, I do like your sister.’

Gagin looked at me. ‘But’—and he hesitated—‘you would not marry her?’

‘How would you have me answer such a question? Judge for yourself, how can I now?’

‘Yes, I know, I know,’ Gagin interrupted. ‘I have not the slightest right to demand an answer of you, my question was in the highest degree impertinent—but what can I do? One mustn’t play with fire. You don’t know Asya. She is capable of falling ill; of running away; of asking you to meet her privately; another would be able to conceal everything and wait, but not she. This is the first time it has happened to her—that’s the trouble! If you had only seen her sobbing at my feet this morning you would understand my fears.’

I reflected. Gagin’s words—‘Ask you to meet her privately’—pierced me to the heart. It seemed to me to be shameful not to answer his honourable frankness by being equally frank.

'Yes,' I said at last, 'you are right. An hour ago I received a note from your sister. There it is.'

Gagin took the note and cast his eyes over it rapidly; he let his hands fall on his knees. The look of astonishment on his face was very amusing, but I did not feel inclined to laugh.

'You are, I repeat, an honourable man,' he said, 'but what are we to do now—what? She herself wants to go away, and she still writes to you, and reproaches herself for having been imprudent. . . . When had she time to write this? What does she want of you?'

I reassured him, and we began to discuss, as calmly as we could, the measures we ought to take.

This is what we decided at last. To prevent a misfortune I was to go to the appointed place and have a full and an honest explanation with Asya; Gagin promised to stay at home and appear not to know anything about her note; and in the evening we arranged to meet again.

'I have entire confidence in you,' said Gagin, and shook my hand. 'Have mercy both on her and on me. In any case we shall be going away to-morrow,' he added, getting up, 'because you will never marry Asya.'

'Give me till this evening,' I said.

'If you like, but you will not marry her.'

He went away, and I threw myself on the sofa and closed my eyes. My head swam. Too many impressions had crowded on me all at once. I was vexed with Gagin's frankness; I was vexed with Asya; her love delighted and troubled me. I could not understand what had made her tell her brother. The necessity for a prompt, almost instant, decision tormented me.

'To marry a girl of seventeen with her character; how is that possible?' I said, rising.



## XV

At the time appointed I crossed the Rhine, and the first person I met on the opposite bank was the boy who had come to me in the morning. He was evidently waiting for me.

'From Fräulein Annette,' he said in a whisper, and handed me another note.

Asya informed me of a change in the place for our meeting. I was to come in an hour and a half, not to the chapel, but to Frau Louise's house; I was to knock at the door and go up to the third story.

'Again "yes"?' asked the boy.

"Yes," I repeated, and walked along the bank of the Rhine. There was not time to return home and I did not want to wander about the streets. Beyond the town walls there was a small garden with a skittle alley and tables for the lovers of beer. Here I entered. Several elderly Germans were playing skittles. The wooden balls rolled noisily, and now and again exclamations of approval could be heard. A pretty waitress with tear-stained eyes brought me a mug of beer. I looked at her, but she quickly turned round and went away.

'Yes, yes,' said a red-cheeked citizen who was sitting near, 'our Hännchen is very sad to-day—her sweetheart has gone away to be a soldier.'

I looked at her; she was standing in a corner and resting her head on her hand, her tears running down her fingers one after another. Somebody asked for beer; she brought him a glass and returned to her place. Her sorrow affected me; I began to think of the meeting I had before me, but my thoughts were not joyful but troubled thoughts. It was not with a light heart that I went to this meeting; I was not going to give myself up to the joys of mutual love, but to fulfil a given word, to execute a difficult duty. 'One can't joke with her': Gagin's words seemed to pierce my heart like arrows. Was it not only four

days before, in the boat carried down by the stream, that I had thirsted for happiness? It became possible, and I wavered, I pushed it away—I had to push it away. . . . Its suddenness disturbed me. Asya herself, with her fiery nature, her history, her education—this attractive, strange creature—I must confess she frightened me. For a long time I struggled with my feelings. The appointed time drew near. ‘I can’t marry her,’ I decided at last; ‘she will never know that I too love her.’

I got up, and putting a *thaler* into the hand of poor Hännchen (she did not even thank me) I started for Frau Louise’s house. The shades of evening were already spreading through the air, and the narrow strip of sky above the dark streets grew rosy with the reflection of the sunset. I knocked softly at the door, which was opened at once. Crossing the threshold I found myself in darkness.

‘This way,’ said the voice of the old woman; ‘you are expected.’

I took two steps, groping my way, and felt somebody’s bony hand in my own.

‘Are you Frau Louise?’ I asked.

‘I am,’ answered the same voice, ‘I am, my fine young man.’

The old woman led me up the steep staircase and stopped at a door on the third floor. By the faint light that came through the tiny window I saw the wrinkled face of the burgomaster’s widow. On her thin lips was a sly, mawkish smile and her dim eyes were screwed up; she pointed to a little door. With a convulsive movement of the hand I opened it and slammed it behind me.

## XVI

The small room which I entered was rather dark, and at first I did not see Asya. She was sitting wrapped up in a long shawl on a chair near the



window, turning her head away and trying to hide it like a frightened bird. She breathed quickly and was trembling all over. I felt unspeakably sorry for her. I went up to her; she only turned further away from me. . . .

'Anna Nikolaevna,' I said.

She suddenly became rigid; she wanted to look at me, but was not able to. I caught her hand: it was cold, and lay as if dead in mine.

'I wanted to . . . ' began Asya, trying to smile, though her pale lips would not obey her: 'I wanted . . . No, I can't!' she added, and stopped. At every word her voice broke.

'Anna Nikolaevna!' I repeated, and I too could not say anything more.

We were both silent. I continued to hold her hand and to look at her. She, as before, sat huddled up, breathing with difficulty and biting her lower lip so as not to cry but keep back the rising tears. I looked at her: there was something touchingly helpless in her timid immobility; it seemed as if she had been quite exhausted, and had only reached the chair in time to sink down on it. My heart melted within me.

'Asya!' I said in a scarcely audible voice.

She slowly lifted her eyes to me. Oh, the look of a woman who loves—who can describe it? These eyes entreated, they showed confidence, they questioned, they surrendered. . . . I could not resist their enchantment. Their subtle fire ran over me, pricking like burning needles. I bent down and kissed her hand.

I heard a trembling sound like a broken sigh, and I felt on my hair the light touch of a hand that shook like a leaf. I lifted my head and saw her face. How suddenly it was transfigured! The expression of fear had quite vanished, and her look seemed to have gone far away and enticed me after it; her lips opened slightly; her forehead was white as marble, and her curls were thrown back as if blown by the wind.

I forgot everything. I drew her towards me; her hand obediently submitting, her whole body was drawn after it, the shawl fell from her shoulders, and her head rested gently on my breast—rested under my burning lips. . . .

'Yours,' she murmured in a scarcely audible whisper.

My arms were already encircling her form. . . . Suddenly the recollection of Gagin flashed like lightning across my mind. 'What are we doing?' I cried, and sprang back. 'Your brother . . . he knows all . . . he knows that I am to meet you!'

Asya sank into a chair.

'Yes,' I continued, rising and going to the other end of the room; 'your brother knows everything. . . . I was obliged to tell him. . . .'

'You were obliged?' she said indistinctly. She evidently could not come to herself, and did not quite understand me.

'Yes, yes,' I repeated in a sort of exasperation, 'and in this you are solely to blame—you only! Why did you tell him your secret? What forced you to tell your brother everything? He came to me to-day and told me all you had said to him.' I tried not to look at Asya and paced the room with long strides. 'Now all is lost, all is lost!'

Asya was about to rise from her chair.

'Stay,' I cried, 'please stay. You have to deal with an honourable man, yes, an honourable man!—But, in God's name, what excited you? Did you see any change in me? I could not deceive your brother when he came to me to-day.'

'What am I saying?' I said to myself, and the thought that I was an immoral deceiver, that Gagin knew of our meeting, that all was discovered, all betrayed, kept ringing in my ears.

'I did not call my brother,' said Asya in a frightened voice, 'he came to me.'

'See what you've done,' I continued, 'and now you want to go away. . . .'



'Yes, I must go away,' she said in the same low tone. 'I asked you to come here only to say good-bye to you.'

'And you think,' I exclaimed, 'that it will be easy for me to part from you?'

'But why did you tell my brother?' Asya repeated, quite perplexed.

'I have already told you I could not act otherwise. If you had not betrayed yourself . . .'

'I locked myself in my room,' she said artlessly, 'I did not know that the landlady had another key.'

This innocent excuse coming from her lips at such a moment almost made me cross at the time, but now I cannot think of it without emotion. That poor, honest, sincere child!

'Now all is finished!' I began again. 'All! Now we must part.' I stealthily looked at Asya: her face was rapidly growing red. I felt that she was both ashamed and afraid. I walked about and talked like one in a fever. 'You did not give time for feelings that were only ripening to develop, you yourself have broken off our friendship, you did not trust me, you doubted me . . .!'

While I was talking Asya leaned more and more forwards, and at last falling on her knees hid her face in her hands and burst into sobs. I ran to her and tried to lift her up, but she would not yield to me. I cannot stand women's tears; at the sight of them I lose my head at once.

'Anna Nikolaevna! Asya!' I kept repeating, 'please—I entreat you—for God's sake—stop!' and I again took her hand.

But to my very great astonishment she suddenly sprang up, and as quick as lightning rushed to the door and vanished.

A few minutes later, when Frau Louise came in, she found me standing in the middle of the room as if struck by a thunderbolt. I could not understand how this meeting had come to an end so soon and in such a silly way—come to an end before I had had time to

say a hundredth part of what I wanted to say, or what I ought to have said, even before I myself knew how it would finish.

'Has the Fräulein gone?' Frau Louise asked me, raising her yellow eyebrows to her very wig.

I looked at her like a fool, and left the house.

## XVII

I hurried out of the town and went into the fields. Vexation, mad vexation, gnawed at my breast. I showered reproaches on myself. How was it I did not understand why Asya had changed our place of meeting? How was it that I did not realise what it must have cost her to come to this old woman? Why did I not keep her back? Alone with her in that obscure, barely lighted room I had found strength, I had found courage, to cast her from me, even to reproach her. Now her image pursued me. I begged her forgiveness; the memory of her pale face, of her tearful, timid eyes, of the uncurled hair on her bent neck, of the light touch of her head on my breast, burned me. 'Yours . . . ' I heard her whisper. 'I acted conscientiously,' I kept repeating to myself. . . . It is not true! did I really want such an ending? Will it be possible for me to part from her? Can I do without her? 'Madman! madman!' I repeated with exasperation.

In the meantime night was coming on. With long strides I started for the house where Asya lived.

## XVIII

Gagin came out to meet me.

'Have you seen my sister?' he called out to me as soon as he saw me.

'Is she not at home?' I asked.

'No.'



'Has she not returned?'

'No. It is my fault,' continued Gagin. 'I had no patience to wait. Contrary to our agreement I went to the chapel; she was not there, so I suppose she did not come?'

'She was not at the chapel.'

'And you have not seen her?'

I had to confess that I had seen her.

'Where?'

'At Frau Louise's. I parted from her an hour ago.' I added, 'I was sure she had returned home.'

'Let us wait,' said Gagin.

We went into the house and sat down side by side. We were silent. We both felt awkward. We constantly turned round, looked at the door, and listened. At last Gagin got up.

'This is impossible!' he cried. 'I feel most uneasy. She will be the death of me, by God! Let us go to look for her.'

We went out. It was quite dark now.

'What did you talk with her about?' he asked, drawing his hat over his eyes.

'I only saw her for about five minutes,' I answered. 'I spoke to her as we had decided.'

'I think,' continued he, 'that we had better go in different directions; we shall find her quicker that way. In any case, come back here in an hour's time.'

## XIX

I quickly descended the path through the vineyard and went into the town. I hurried through all the streets, looked about everywhere, even into Frau Louise's window, returned to the Rhine, and ran along its banks. Occasionally I saw women's figures, but Asya was nowhere to be seen. It was no longer vexation that gnawed at my heart, but a secret dread that tormented me, and it was not only dread that I felt, but also remorse, the most burning regret, love—

yes, the tenderest love! I wrung my hands and called to Asya into the midst of the ever-increasing shades of night, at first in a low voice, but afterwards louder and louder each time; I repeated a hundred times that I loved her, I swore never to leave her; I would have given all I had in the world to hold her cold hand again, to hear her low voice again, to see her before me once more! She was so near me, she came to me with entire resolution, in the entire innocence of heart and feelings, she brought me her untouched youth. . . . And I did not press her to my bosom, but deprived myself of the bliss of seeing how her dear little face would have beamed with joy and the calmness of rapture. . . . These thoughts drove me mad.

'Where could she have gone? What has she done to herself?' I cried with the grief of impotent despair. Something white appeared on the river's brink. I knew the place—there, over the grave of a man who had been drowned some seventy years before, stood a cross half buried in the ground with an old inscription. My heart sank within me. I ran towards the cross; the white figure disappeared. I called 'Asya!' My wild voice frightened me—but nobody answered. I decided to go and inquire if Gagin had found her.

## XX

Hurrying up the hill by the little pathway I saw a light in Asya's window. This somewhat reassured me.

I went up to the house: the door was bolted. I knocked. The window of the unlighted room of the ground-floor cautiously opened and Gagin's head appeared.

'Have you found her?' I asked him.

'She has returned,' he answered in a whisper, 'she is in her room undressing. All is in order.'

'Thank God!' I cried in an indescribable ecstasy



of delight : 'Thank God ! now all will be well. But, you know, we must have another talk.'

'Another time,' he quietly answered, drawing the window to ; 'another time, but now good-bye !'

'Till to-morrow,' I murmured ; 'to-morrow all will be settled.'

'Good-bye !' repeated Gagin.

The window closed.

I almost knocked at the window. I wanted to tell Gagin at once that I asked for his sister's hand. But such a proposal—at such a time . . . 'Till to-morrow,' I thought ; 'to-morrow I shall be happy !'

'To-morrow I shall be happy !' Happiness has no to-morrow—it has not even a yesterday ; it does not remember the past, does not think of the future, it has only the present—and not even a day, only a moment.

I do not remember how I got back to Z——. It was not my legs that carried me, it was not a boat that bore me across the river ; large strong wings lifted me up. I passed a bush in which a nightingale was singing. I stopped to listen : it appeared to me that it sang of my love and of my happiness.

## XXI

The next morning, when I approached the familiar house, one circumstance astonished me : all the windows were wide open, and the door was open too ; bits of paper were lying about before the threshold ; the servant appeared at the door, broom in hand.

I went towards her.

'They have gone away !' she shouted, before I had time to ask 'Is Gagin at home ?'

'Gone away ?' I repeated. 'What do you mean ? Where have they gone ?'

'They went away this morning at six o'clock, and did not say where. Wait a minute, I think you are Mr N—— ?'

'Yes, I am Mr N——.'

'The mistress has a letter for you.' The maid went upstairs and brought me a letter: 'Here it is, sir.'

'But it cannot be. . . . How is it . . . ?' I began. The maid looked stupidly at me and went on sweeping.

I opened the letter. It was Gagin who wrote to me—there was not a word from Asya. He began by asking me not to be angry with him for their sudden departure; he was sure that after mature reflection I would approve of his decision. He could not find any other way out of a situation which might become difficult and dangerous. 'Last night,' he wrote, 'while we were both silently waiting for Asya, I was finally convinced of the necessity of this separation. There are prejudices which I esteem; I understand that you cannot marry Asya. She has told me all, and for her peace I had to agree to her repeated, redoubled entreaty. . . . At the close of his letter he expressed regret that our acquaintance had so quickly come to an end, wished me happiness, pressed my hand in friendship, and begged me not to try to look for them.'

'What prejudices?' I cried as if he could have heard me. 'What nonsense! Who has the right to take her away from me?' I caught hold of my head. . . .

The maid called out loudly to the landlady; her fright brought me to myself. I had only one thought in my mind—to find them, to find them at any cost. To accept this blow, to reconcile myself with this result, was impossible. I learned from the landlady that they had taken the six o'clock steamer and gone down the Rhine. I went to the booking office, where I was told they had taken tickets to Cologne. I went home with the intention of packing up at once and following them. I happened to pass by Frau Louise's house. Suddenly I heard somebody calling to me. I looked up and saw at the window of the room in which the day before I had met Asya the face of



the Burgomaster's widow. She smiled her repugnant smile and beckoned to me. I was about to turn away, but she called after me that she had something for me. These words arrested me, and I went into her house. How can I explain my feelings when I saw that room again?

'I really ought only to have given you this,' began the old woman, showing me a little note, 'if you had come to me yourself, but you are such a nice young man that you may have it!'

I took the note.

On a small scrap of paper the following words were hastily scribbled in pencil:—

Farewell! we shall never meet again. It is not pride that makes me go away; no, I can't act otherwise! Yesterday, when I wept before you, if you had said one word, one single word, I should have stayed. You did not say it—so it is evident it is better thus. Farewell for ever!

'One word. . . .' Oh, what a madman I am! That one word. . . . I had repeated it with tears the day before. I had thrown it to the winds, I repeated it in the empty fields, but I did not say it to her—I did not tell her that I loved her! I could not then even pronounce that word. When I met her in that fatal room I was not clearly conscious of my love; it was not even aroused when I sat with her brother in our absurd and painful silence; it only burst out with irrepressible force some few minutes later, when, afraid of a misfortune, I began to search for her and to call her . . . but it was then already too late. 'But this is impossible!' I shall be told; I do not know if it is possible or not, I only know it is true. Asya would never have gone away if there had been in her nature only a shadow of coquetry, and if her position had not been false. She could not bear what every other girl would have borne: I did not understand that. My evil genius had stopped the confession on my lips when I last met Gagin at the darkened window,

and so the last thread which I could still grasp slipped out of my hands.

That same day I packed my trunks, returned to L——, and started for Cologne. I remember, as the steamer was getting under way and I was mentally taking leave of all those streets, all those places, which I could never forget, I saw Hännchen. She was sitting on a bench near the river bank. Her face was pale but not sad; a good-looking young fellow was standing near, laughing and telling her something; and on the other bank of the Rhine my little Madonna continued to look sadly from out of the dark green shade of the old ash.

## XXII

In Cologne I came upon traces of the Gugins, learning that they had gone to London; I followed them, but in London my search was all in vain. For a long time I could not be reconciled, for a long time I persisted in my search, but at last I was obliged to give up all hope of finding them.

I never saw them again—I never even saw Asya again. Uncertain reports about the man reached me, but she had disappeared for ever. I do not even know if she is still alive. Once several years later, when abroad, I saw at the window of a passing train a woman whose face forcibly reminded me of those never-to-be-forgotten features, but I probably was misled by some chance resemblance. Asya remained in my memory the same girl I had known in the best years of my life, as I saw her for the last time leaning over the back of a low wooden chair.

I must confess that I did not grieve for her long; I even found that fate had decided well in preventing my union with her. I consoled myself with the thought that I should probably not have been happy with such a wife. I was young then, and the future, that short, fleeting future, appeared to me boundless. I thought, 'Cannot that which has been repeat itself,



be even better, even more beautiful than it was before . . . ?' I have known other women, but the feelings that had been aroused in me by Asya, those burning, tender, deep feelings, I never knew again. No! no other eyes could replace those eyes that had once turned to me so full of love—to no other heart that had been pressed to my breast had my heart responded with such joyful sweetness! Condemned to the solitary life of a homeless wanderer I drag out my sad years, but I keep as sacred relics her little notes and the faded geranium flower—the same flower she once threw to me from the window. It still retains a faint scent, but the hand that gave it me, the hand that I only once was able to press to my lips, has perhaps long since decayed in the grave. . . .

And I myself—what has become of me? What is left of me, of those happy, troubled days, of those winged hopes and aspirations? The faint exhalation from an insignificant plant survives all the joys and all the sorrows of man—survives even man himself.

A fine hook.  
of worth reading to  
entertainment. Blakely 1890.

# FEDOR MIKHAYLOVICH DOSTOEVSKI

1821-81

## A NASTY STORY

THIS nasty story dates from just that time when our dear country was beginning to pass through the period of regeneration, a period which opened with such irresistible force and with such touchingly naive transports of delight, when all her valorous sons aspired to new hopes and a new destiny. At that time, one bright, frosty, winter's evening at a little past eleven o'clock, three very honourable men were sitting in a comfortable, even luxurious room in a fine two-storied house on the Petersburg Side. They were occupied in serious and absorbing talk on a most interesting subject. All three men were of the rank of General. They were seated round a small table, each in a beautiful, soft arm-chair, and during their conversation quietly sipped champagne from time to time. The bottle stood on the table in a silver wine-cooler. The fact of the matter is that the master of the house, Privy Councillor Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, an old bachelor of sixty-five, was holding a house-warming in his newly-purchased house, and at the same time celebrating his birthday, which happened to fall on that day, but of which he had never before taken any notice. The celebration was nothing very out of the way, for, as we have already seen, there were only two guests, both of them former colleagues and subordinates of Mr. Nikiforov's, by name,



one of them Actual State Councillor Semen Ivanovich Shipulenko, and the other, also Actual State Councillor, Ivan Il'ich Pralinski. They had come about nine o'clock to tea and had afterwards sat down to a glass of wine, and they knew that at exactly half-past eleven they would have to go home. Their host had all his life preferred regular habits. And here we must say two words about him. He had begun his career as a small government official without any private means, and had quietly rubbed along for five and forty years, knowing very well the height to which he would attain in the service. He could not bear to scramble for the stars above, although he had already two of them, and particularly disliked to give his personal opinion on any subject. He was honest too, that is to say, he had never had occasion to do anything very dishonest; he was a bachelor because he was an egotist; he was not at all stupid, but could not bear to show his cleverness; he particularly disliked slovenliness and enthusiasm, which he considered moral slovenliness, and towards the end of his life he had gradually sunk into a sort of sweet, lazy comfort and systematic solitude. Although he sometimes visited the better sort of people, from his youth upwards he had not been able to bear receiving guests at home, and during later years, if he was not playing the *Grande-patience*, he contented himself with the company of his clock, and would sit for whole evenings serenely dreaming in an arm-chair, and listening to it ticking on the mantelpiece under its glass case. He was very respectable to look at, and being clean-shaven looked younger than he was. Well-preserved, he promised to live long and conducted himself in the manner of the strictest gentleman. He occupied a pretty comfortable post; he was on some sort of board and had some sort of papers to sign. In a word, he was considered a most excellent man. He had only one passion, or it would be better to say, he had only one burning desire: that was to possess a house, a house built in the style of a gentle-



man's residence, not a house to be let off in flats or shops. And this wish had at last been realized. He had looked about him and had bought a house on the Petersburg Side; true, it was rather far away, but it had a garden and was beautifully built. The new householder considered it an advantage to be far away, as he did not like company at home, and for the purpose of going to see any one, or to the office, he had a fine, two-seated, chocolate-coloured carriage, a pair of small, strong, but handsome horses, and a coachman, Mikhey. All this he had himself acquired by forty years of minute economy, so that it all delighted his heart. This is why, having purchased a house and moved into it, Stepan Nikiforovich felt in his peaceful soul such satisfaction that he actually invited guests on his birthday, a day he had always carefully kept secret from his most intimate friends.

One of his guests he had special reasons for inviting. He himself only occupied the upper story of his house, and for the lower story, which was constructed exactly the same, he required a tenant. Stepan Nikiforovich was reckoning on Semen Ivanovich Shipulenko, and during the evening had twice turned the conversation on this subject. But Semen Ivanovich had kept silent in the matter. He was a man with black hair and whiskers, and a complexion that looked as if he suffered from chronic jaundice; he too had with difficulty and long years of toil made his way. He was a married man, a morose stay-at-home who kept his family in fear; he was self-confident in his work, and he too very well knew what rank he could attain to, and better still, what rank he could never attain to; he held a warm post and sat there very tight. He looked on the new order of things not without a certain bitterness, but did not trouble much about them, and he listened to Ivan Il'ich Pralinski's big talk on the new themes with a malicious smile. As a matter of fact they had all drunk rather too much, and even Stepan Nikiforovich condescended to enter into an argument with



Mr. Pralinski on the subject of the new reforms. We must now say a few words about Mr. Pralinski, who is the chief hero of the following tale.

It was only four months since State Councillor Ivan Il'ich Pralinski had begun to be called 'Your Excellency,' so he was only a young General. Even in years he was young, about forty-three—certainly not more—and looked, and liked looking, even younger. He was a tall, handsome man who loved to be well-dressed and prided himself on the good quality of his clothes; he also wore with dignity the moderately high decoration he had round his neck. From his childhood he had understood how to pick up some of the manners of the best society, and as he was a bachelor he dreamed of a rich bride, even of one of high birth. There were many other things he dreamed of, although he was far from stupid. He was often a great talker and loved to assume parliamentary poses. He was descended from a good family, being the lily-fingered son of a General, and in his early childhood had worn velvet and fine linen. He had been educated in an aristocratic school, and though he had left it bringing away with him but little learning, he had succeeded well in the civil service and had pushed up to the rank of General. His superiors considered him a very able man and went so far as to place great hopes in him. Stepan Nikiforovich, under whom he had begun and continued his official career almost up to the time he rose to the rank of General, had never considered him very capable, and had never reposed any hopes in him. What he liked about him was that he was of good family and had a private fortune: that is to say, he owned a large lucrative house, let off in flats, with its own manager; that he was related to many far from unimportant personages; and, above all, that he had a very dignified bearing. In his heart Stepan Nikiforovich blamed him for too much imagination and for a certain levity. Ivan Il'ich himself sometimes felt that he was too egotistical and sensitive. Strange to say, he had



occasional fits of sickly conscientiousness, and sometimes even a feeling of slight repentance for something. He acknowledged in his soul with bitterness and secret heartache that he did not really soar as high as he imagined. At those moments he fell into a state of dejection (more especially when his hæmorrhoids were troublesome), called his life '*une existence manquée*,' ceased (privately of course) to believe even in himself or his parliamentary capacities, and called himself an empty talker and a phrase-maker. Although all this was of course much to his credit, it did not prevent his raising his head again half an hour later and assuring himself with all the more courage and obstinacy that he would still have time to develop, and would not only attain high rank but would become a great statesman, long to be remembered in Russia. He had even distant glimmers of a monument raised in his honour. From all this it can be seen that Ivan Il'ich aimed high, though he hid away even from himself his secret, uncertain thoughts and hopes. In short, he was a kind man, and a poet at heart. In the course of the last few years his moments of ill-health and disenchantment had visited him more often. He had become irritable and suspicious and was ready to consider every contradiction as an offence. The regeneration of Russia suddenly gave him great hopes. The rank of General only confirmed them. He started up; he raised his head; he suddenly began to speak eloquently and at length, to speak on the very newest subjects and ideas, which he had rapidly and unaccountably adopted with passion. He sought for occasions to speak. He went about town searching for them and in many places gained the reputation of being a hopeless Liberal, which flattered him very much. This evening, having drunk about four glasses of wine, he became more talkative than usual. He wanted to convert Stepan Nikiforovich, whom he had not seen for a long time, and whom he had till then always honoured and even obeyed. For some reason he now considered him a retrograde and fell upon



him with unusual heat. Stepan Nikiforovich hardly contradicted him, although the subject interested him too, but sat and listened slyly. Ivan Il'ich became excited, and in the heat of an imaginary argument applied his lips more often than he should to his glass. Then Stepan Nikiforovich took up the bottle and at once refilled the glass, which for some unknown reason began to offend Ivan Il'ich; especially as Semen Ivanovich Shipulenko, whom he particularly despised and even feared, on account of his cynical contemptuousness, sat by in malicious silence and smiled more often than was necessary. 'They think I'm a mere boy!' shot through Ivan Il'ich's head.

'No, sir, it is time, it was time long ago,' he continued. 'We are already too late, sir; to my mind to be humane is the important thing, to be humane towards your subordinates, remembering that they too are men. Humaneness will save everything, will carry everything through . . .'

'He, he, he!' came from the side where Semen Ivanovich was sitting.

'But why, may I ask, are you giving us such a roasting?' remarked Stepan Nikiforovich at last with an amiable smile. 'I must confess, Ivan Il'ich, that so far I have not been able to understand what you have been good enough to explain. You have been exalting humaneness. Does that mean love for humanity?'

'Yes, perhaps it is love for the whole of humanity. I—'

'Permit me, sir! As far as I can judge, the matter does not stop there. Love for humanity must always exist; the reforms are not limited to that. All sorts of questions have been raised, relating to the peasants, law reforms, agriculture, spirit licences, morals, and so on; the questions are without end, and taken all together, all at once, they may cause very great—let us say—oscillations. That is what we are afraid of, not only humaneness . . .'

'Yes, sir, the matter is deeper,' remarked Semen Ivanovich.

'I quite understand, sir, and allow me to observe, Semen Ivanovich, that I do not for a moment consent to remain behind you in the depth of your comprehension of these matters,' remarked Ivan Il'ich in a cutting and sarcastic tone; 'but nevertheless I take the liberty of remarking to you, Stepan Nikiforovich, that you too do not understand me at all.'

'I don't understand?'

'I continue to hold the idea and propound it everywhere that humaneness, and particularly humaneness to one's subordinates—from the officials to the clerks, from the clerks to the porters, from the porters to the peasants—humaneness, I repeat, can serve as a cornerstone for the coming reforms, and in general for the regeneration of things. Why? Because—take the syllogism: "I am humane, therefore I am loved. They love me, consequently they put trust in me. They put trust—consequently trust—trust consequently love. . . ." No—I mean—I wanted to say, if they trust, they will also have trust in the reforms, they will understand, so to speak, the very essence of the matter—so to speak, will embrace morally and settle up the whole question, amicably, fundamentally. What are you laughing at, Semen Ivanovich? Is it incomprehensible?'

Stepan Nikiforovich silently raised his brows; he was astonished.

'I fancy I have drunk a little too much,' remarked Semen Ivanovich maliciously, 'and therefore I am slow of comprehension—a little foggy in the understanding, sir!'

Ivan Il'ich shrugged his shoulders.

'We shan't stand the test,' remarked Stepan Nikiforovich, after a short meditation.

'In what way shan't we stand the test?' asked Ivan Il'ich, surprised at Stepan Nikiforovich's sudden and abrupt remark.



'No, we shan't stand it'—Stepan Nikiforovich evidently did not want to say any more.

'Does your remark refer to new wine and new bottles?' said Ivan Il'ich ironically. 'No, sir, I can answer for myself!'

At that moment the clock struck half-past eleven.

'Here we sit and sit, but we really ought to be going,' said Semen Ivanovich, preparing to rise from his chair. But Ivan Il'ich was before him. He at once got up, went to the fire-place, and took his sable cap. He looked offended.

'Well, what will you do, Semen Ivanovich? Will you think it over?' said Stepan Nikiforovich as he took them to the door.

'About the flat, sir? I will think it over—I will think it over.'

'You will tell me as soon as you have made up your mind?'

'Always talking business?' remarked Mr. Pralinski amicably, trying to attract their attention as he played with his cap. It seemed to him as if they had forgotten him.

Stepan Nikiforovich raised his brows and said nothing, as a sign that he did not want to detain his guests. Semen Ivanovich hastily took leave.

'Well, well . . . after that, have it your own way! If you don't understand simple politeness'—thought Mr. Pralinski, and with a special air of independence he stretched out his hand to Stepan Nikiforovich.

In the lobby Ivan Il'ich wrapped himself up in his light and costly fur coat and tried not to notice Semen Ivanovich's well-worn raccoon. Then they both went downstairs.

'Our old friend seemed offended at something,' said Ivan Il'ich to silent Semen Ivanovich.

'No, why should he be?' answered the other quietly and coldly.

'Slave!' thought Ivan Il'ich.

When they came to the porch Semen Ivanovich's sledge with its poor grey horse drove up.

'What the devil—? where has Trifon got to with my carriage?' cried Ivan Il'ich, not seeing it drive up.

He looked this way and that, but no carriage was to be seen. Stepan Nikiforovich's man knew nothing about it. He asked Varlam, Semen Ivanovich's coachman, and was told that he had been there all the time, and the carriage too, but now it was not.

'A nasty story,' remarked Mr. Shipulenko. 'If you like I can take you home.'

'These people are rascals!' cried Mr. Pralinski angrily. 'The rogue asked to go to a wedding somewhere here on the Petersburg Side; some sort of a *kuma*<sup>1</sup> was to be married, the devil take her! I strictly forbade him to leave this spot. I don't mind betting he has gone there!'

'That is where he has gone,' remarked Varlam, 'but he promised to be back in a minute, so as to be just in time.'

'Quite so! I had a sort of presentiment! He'll catch it!'

'You had better have him whipped at the police station, then he will do your bidding better,' said Semen Ivanovich as he fastened the apron of his sledge.

'Please don't trouble about me, Semen Ivanovich.'

'Then you don't want me to drive you home?'

'A pleasant journey, *merci*.'

Semen Ivanovich drove away, and Ivan Il'ich started on foot along the boards that served as a footpath, feeling very much put out.

'No, you shall catch it now—you rascal! I will go home on foot—just to make you feel, just to frighten you! You'll return and hear that the master has had to go off on foot—you worthless scamp!'

Ivan Il'ich had never before used so much abuse, but this time he was very angry, and in addition he

<sup>1</sup> Men and women who have stood together as sponsors for a child are called *kum* and *kuma*



had a buzzing in the head. He was a man who did not drink, so that some five or six glasses soon had an effect on him. The night was enchanting. It was frosty but unusually still and without any wind. The sky was clear and starry. The full moon flooded the earth with a pale silver brightness. It was so fine that after going about fifty paces Ivan Il'ich almost forgot his troubles. For some reason he felt very contented, and people who have had just a little drop too much change their ideas rapidly. He was even pleased with the dowdy houses in the empty streets.

'It's a good thing that I had to start on foot,' he thought. 'It will be a lesson for Trifon—and a pleasure for me. Indeed I ought to walk more. What does it matter? I shall find an *izvoshchik* in the Great Prospect at once. What a fine night! What strange little houses they all are! Probably only small people live here—small officials, shopkeepers perhaps. . . . Strange of Stepan Nikiforovich! How retrograde they all are—what sleepy old fellows! Old dormice—that's exactly what they are! *c'est le mot*. Nevertheless he is a clever man; he has the *bon sens*, the sober practical understanding of things. But all the same, old men, old men! They haven't got the—whatever is it? Well, it's all one—something is lacking. "We shan't stand the test!" What did he mean by that? He fell into a reverie when he said it. . . . He didn't understand me at all. Why couldn't he understand it? It was more difficult not to understand than to understand. The chief thing is that I am convinced—convinced with my whole soul. Humaneness—love of mankind! To restore man to himself—to restore to him his real worth, and then with the material that is ready to hand you can begin the work! It seems quite clear! Yes, sir. Allow me, Your Excellency, let us take the syllogism: for example, we meet a government clerk, a poor forgotten clerk. Well, who are you? The answer—a government clerk. Very well, a clerk; go on: what sort of a clerk? The answer—such



and such a clerk. Have you a job?—Yes, I have! Do you want to be happy?—I do. What do you need to be happy?—This and that!—Why? Because . . . And the man understands me in two words: the man is mine, the man is caught, so to speak, in my nets, and I do with him what I want—that is to say for his own good. Semen Ivanovich is an unpleasant man, and what a nasty face he has got! “Have him whipped at the police station”—he said that on purpose. Empty words! Whip him yourself—I won’t whip him; I will humble Trifon with words, he will be humbled by my reproaches, and then he will *feel*. As for whipping, well—that’s an unsettled question. . . . Shall I look in at Emerans’s?—Pff, the devil take these damned boards!’ he called out as he slipped and almost lost his footing; ‘—and this is the capital—this is enlightenment! You might break your leg.—H’m, I can’t bear that Semen Ivanovich, a most disagreeable person. It was at me he tittered when I said “morally embrace.” Well, and if they do embrace, what is that to you? No fear of my embracing you. I’d rather embrace a peasant. If a peasant meets me, well, I will talk to a peasant. . . . By the by, I was a little drunk, and perhaps did not express myself quite as I should have done. Why, even now, perhaps, I don’t express myself quite as I want to. H’m! I’ll never drink again. In the evening you chatter; the next day you repent. Well, anyhow I’m not staggering in my walk!—All the same they are all rascals!’

These were his reflections, broken and unconnected, as Ivan Il’ich went along the footway. The fresh air had affected him, had, so to speak, shaken him up. In five minutes more he would have calmed down and become sleepy. But suddenly when he was within a few steps of the Great Prospect he heard the sounds of music. He looked round. On the other side of the street, in a very dilapidated wooden house, long but single-storied, a feast was being held; the fiddles squeaked, the double-bass droned, and the



flutes shrilled, to the tune of a gay quadrille. Under the windows stood an audience, chiefly consisting of women in quilted cloaks with handkerchiefs on their heads; they were trying with all their might to catch some glimpse of what was going on through the chinks of the shutters. Evidently it was all very gay inside. The noise of the thumping feet of the dancers could be heard on the other side of the street. Ivan Il'ich noticed a policeman standing not far away and went up to him.

'Whose house is this, my good man?' he asked, throwing open his costly fur coat just sufficiently to allow the policeman to see the important decoration he wore round his neck.

'The government official Pseldonymov, a *legistrar*,<sup>1</sup> answered the policeman, at once noticing the decoration and drawing himself up.

'Pseldonymov? Bah, Pseldonymov! What? Is he getting married?'

'Yes, he is getting married, your honour, to the daughter of a Titular Councillor. Mlekopitaev is a Titular Councillor—he used to serve in the Courts of Justice. He is giving this house to the bride as dowry.'

'So that it is now Pseldonymov's and not Mlekopitaev's house?'

'It is Pseldonymov's, your honour. It used to be Mlekopitaev's and now it is Pseldonymov's.'

'H'm! I asked you, my friend, because I am his chief. I am the General in charge of the office where Pseldonymov works.'

'Just so, Your Excellency.' The policeman now stood at attention, and Ivan Il'ich seemed to be thinking. He stood a moment reflecting. . . .

Yes, it was quite true—Pseldonymov was in his office, even in his department, he could well remember that. He had a very small post with a salary of some ten roubles a month. As Mr. Pralinski had only lately taken over his department, it would have been quite excusable if he had not been able to remember

<sup>1</sup> The policeman confuses 'legislator' with 'registrar.'

all the clerks working under him, but Pseldonymov he remembered on account of his name. It caught his eye the first time he saw it, and he looked curiously at the owner of so strange a name. He remembered now a very young man with a long hooked nose and very light hair that seemed to grow in patches; he was thin and underfed, he dressed in an impossible uniform and impossible, almost indecent inexpressibles. He remembered that at the time the thought had occurred to him to give the poor devil a bonus of ten roubles at New Year for a new rig-out. But as the face of the poor fellow was so cadaverous, and his look so unsympathetic as to amount to repulsiveness, the kind thought had somehow evaporated and in the end Pseldonymov had gone without the bonus. He was all the more astonished when a week before this very Pseldonymov had asked his permission to get married. Ivan Il'ich remembered that at the moment he had had no time to look into the matter more closely, so the question of the marriage was settled casually and quickly. Nevertheless, he distinctly remembered that Pseldonymov was to receive with his bride a wooden house and four hundred roubles in money; this circumstance astonished him at the time; he remembered, too, having made a little joke about the union of the families Pseldonymov and Mlekopitaev. All this he distinctly remembered.

Yes, he remembered all this and became deeper and deeper immersed in thought. We all know how a whole train of thought sometimes passes through our mind in a moment as a kind of sensation not translated into human language, much less into literary language. However, we shall try to render all the feelings that passed through our hero's mind, so that the reader may be able to understand at least the main points, so to speak, of what was most essential and specious in them. There are many of our feelings that, if put into words, would appear quite improbable, and that is why they never see the light but remain



hidden away in each of us. Of course the feelings and thoughts of Ivan Il'ich were a little incoherent, but you know the cause of that.

'Now why is it,' flashed through his mind, 'that we all talk and talk, and when something demands action nothing comes of it? Here's an example—take this very Pseldonymov: he came back a short time ago from his wedding ceremony, full of excitement, hope, the expectation of enjoyment. This is one of the most blessed days of his life. . . . Now he is busy with his guests—giving a feast—a poor, simple feast, but gay and hearty enough. What would happen if he knew that at this moment I—I, his chief, his highest chief—am standing before his house listening to his music?—Yes, upon my word, what would he say then? Yes, and what would happen to him if suddenly I entered the room? H'm! Of course at first he would be afraid of me, he would be struck dumb with confusion. I should disturb him, disconcert him—disconcert them all perhaps!—Yes, it would be so if any other General came in, but not with me. That's just where it lies, any other and not me. . . .

'Yes, Stepan Nikiforovich, you did not understand me just now; here you have a living example.

'Yes, sir. We are all shouting about humaneness, but a heroic act, a great deed, we are incapable of doing!

'What heroic act? Why this! Just think: in the present relations of human society, for me—for me to go into the house of my subordinate, a registrar, on a salary of ten roubles a month—at nearly one o'clock at night would be to cause confusion, it would be turning things topsy-turvy—the last days of Pompeii—absurd! Nobody would understand it. Stepan Nikiforovich would not understand it to his dying day. Didn't he say we shan't stand the test? No, not you old men, paralysed and inert. But I shall stand the test! I will turn the last day of Pompeii into the sweetest day of his life for my subordinate, and turn a wild act into a normal, patriarchal,

high, and moral action. How? In this way. Have the goodness to listen. . . .

'Well . . . Let us suppose that I enter: they will be astonished, the dancing will stop, they will look surprised, taken aback. Yes, but it is just here that I shall distinguish myself; I shall go straight up to the frightened Pseldonymov, and with the most amiable smile, but at the same time in the simplest words, I will say, "You see I have been to his Excellency Stepan Nikiforovich's. I suppose you know him, since you are neighbours. . . ." Then I'll tell in my most humorous manner the adventure with Trifon. From Trifon I'll proceed to describe how I started on foot. . . . "Well, I heard music, and was curious to know whence it came, so I asked a policeman, and heard that you, my friend, had just got married. Well, think I, suppose I go into my subordinate's house and see how my clerks amuse themselves—how they get married. I suppose you won't turn me out!" Turn me out? What a word for one who is your subordinate! How would he dare to turn me out! I think he would sooner go mad, he'd run his legs off to get me an arm-chair, would tremble with delight, would not be able to understand it all at first.

'Now, what could be simpler, more refined, than such an action? Why had I come in? That's quite another question. This is, so to speak, the moral side of the matter. That's the pith of it.

'H'm. . . . What was I thinking about?—Oh, yes!

'Well, of course they will make room for me near the most important guests, some sort of Titular Councillor or relation, a retired staff-captain with a red nose.—Some sort of individual like those Gogol describes. Of course I am introduced to the bride, praise her, encourage the guests, beg them not to mind me but go on amusing themselves and dancing. I joke, laugh—in a word, I am charming, amiability itself. I am always amiable and charming when I



am pleased with myself. . . . H'm!—That's just it, I am still just a little . . . not drunk, you know, but just . . .

'Of course I, as a gentleman, am on the same footing as the others, I don't for a moment require any special attentions. But morally, morally—that's quite another question; they will understand, and value it. . . . My act will arouse their latent nobility. . . . Well, I sit there for half an hour, perhaps even an hour. I shall go away just before supper of course. They will have been busy making preparations, baking and roasting—they will bow low—beg me to remain, but I shall only take one glass to drink the health of the young couple in and refuse to take any supper. I shall say "Business," and as soon as I say "Business," everyone will assume a respectful and serious expression. By this I shall delicately indicate who they are and who I am—there is a difference. . . . The earth and the sky.—Not that I want to suggest that, but of course one must—from a moral standpoint it is necessary, whatever you may say. Besides, I shall smile at the same time, perhaps even laugh, and afterwards everyone will approve. . . . I may joke again with the bride; h'm—I can even say—yes, I can hint that I will return again exactly in nine months in the capacity of godfather! He, he! She is sure to have a baby by that time! They breed like rabbits.—Everyone will laugh and the bride will blush; I shall kiss her forehead with feeling, I may perhaps give her my blessing, and—to-morrow in the office everyone will know of my action. But to-morrow I am strict again, to-morrow I am once more exacting, inexorable, but then they all know that I am like that. They know my soul, they know the main point: "He is strict as a chief—but as a man, why, he's an angel!" And thus I have conquered: I have caught them by one small act which would never have come into your head; now they are mine; I am the father—they the children. Now then, your Excellency Stepan Nikiforovich, go and do the same sort of thing. . . .

'Yes, do you know, do you understand, that Pseldonymov will tell his children how the General himself came to the reception and drank at his wedding? And these children will tell their children, and they to their grandchildren, as the most sacred anecdote, that the leader, the great statesman (I shall be all this by that time) honoured them; and so on, and so on. I shall lift up the morally humbled, I shall restore him to himself . . . for does he not get only ten roubles salary a month? I have but to repeat this five times or ten, or something of the same kind, and I shall gain popularity everywhere. I shall be imprinted on all hearts, and the devil only knows what can afterwards be the result of all this popularity!'

In this or almost this way Ivan Il'ich argued with himself. (Well, gentlemen, there are many things a man says to himself at times, especially when he is in a somewhat eccentric condition.) All these arguments flashed through his mind in the space of half a minute, and it is probable that he would have contented himself with these reflections, and merely bringing Stepan Nikiforovich mentally to shame, would have gone quietly home and retired to bed—better for him if he had!—but the whole trouble was, that the moment was an eccentric one.

As if on purpose, at that moment he suddenly pictured to himself in his excited imagination the self-satisfied faces of Stepan Nikiforovich and Semen Ivanovich.

'We shan't stand the test,' Stepan Nikiforovich had repeated, smiling haughtily.

'He, he, he!' echoed Semen Ivanovich with his very nastiest smile.

'Let us see whether we shan't stand the test!' said Ivan Il'ich with determination, and his face flushed. He descended from the boarded footpath, crossed the road with firm steps, and entered the house of his subordinate, the registrar Pseldonymov.



His star led him on. He passed through the little gate bravely, and contemptuously pushed aside with his foot the long-haired, mangy little dog which more from propriety than from fierceness threw itself at his feet, barking loudly. He went along the boards that led to the front door and the small projecting iron-roofed porch, and going up three very rickety wooden steps found himself in a tiny entrance. Although the end of a tallow candle or a night-light was burning in a corner here, that did not prevent Ivan Il'ich from stepping with his left foot, galosh and all, into a galantine that had been put out to cool. Ivan Il'ich bent down, and peering with curiosity saw that there were two other dishes with some sort of jelly and two moulds evidently full of blanc-mange. The squashed galantine somewhat confused him, and for one short moment the thought crossed his brain, should he not quietly go back? But he considered this too mean. Calculating that nobody had seen him or would be likely to suspect him, he hastily wiped his galosh to conceal all traces, groped about, and found a felt-covered door, which he opened. He stepped into a tiny lobby, half of which was literally filled up with all sorts of cloaks, coats, furs, capes, hoods, caps, scarves, and galoshes; the other half was occupied by the musicians: two fiddles, a flute, and a double bass, four men in all, who had of course been picked up in the street. They sat at an unpainted table, and by the light of one tallow candle were scraping away vigorously at the last figure of a quadrille. Through the open door the dancers could be seen in a cloud of dust, tobacco smoke, and vapour from the kitchen. It had the look of mad gaiety. You could hear laughter, shouts, and piercing shrieks from the ladies. The men stamped like a squadron of cavalry. Above all the racket there could be heard the commands of the leader of the dance, evidently a wild young man who was quite carried away by the dance. '*Cavaliers, avancez—chaine des dames—balancez,*' and so on, and so on. Ivan Il'ich, not without some



emotion, threw off his fur coat and galoshes, and with his fur cap in his hand entered the room. He had by now ceased to reason. . . .

For the first moment nobody noticed him, everybody being too much occupied with the dance that was just coming to an end. Ivan Il'ich stood quite dumbfounded and could distinguish nothing among the general confusion. Ladies' dresses flew past him, men with cigarettes in their mouths hurried by; a pale blue scarf of some lady whirled before his eyes and hit him on the nose; she was followed by a medical student with a flowing mane of dishevelled hair who rushed madly on, pushing him roughly out of the way; a long-legged officer of some unknown regiment, stiff as a milestone, flashed before him; somebody in hurrying by and stamping like the others, cried out in an unnatural, squeaky voice: 'Eh, eh, Pseldonimushka!' Under Ivan Il'ich's feet there was something sticky; the floor had evidently been waxed. There must have been about thirty guests in the room (which by the way was a fairly large one).

In another minute the quadrille came to an end, and almost immediately it all turned out exactly as Ivan Il'ich had imagined while he was still thinking on the boarded footway. The guests and the dancers had not had time to regain their breath and wipe the sweat from their brows, when a murmur passed through their ranks, a sort of unusual whisper. All eyes, all heads turned quickly towards the guest who had just entered. Then everyone began gradually to move away and step back. Those who had not noticed him were pulled by their dresses and made to understand. They looked round and at once fell back with the others. Ivan Il'ich was still standing in the doorway, not taking a step forward, and between him and the guests the open space, strewn with numberless papers from sweets, cigarette ends, and tickets, became larger and larger. Suddenly a young man stepped shyly into this space; he had a shock of light-coloured hair and a long hooked nose, and he wore the undress



uniform of the civil service. He came forward bowing and looked at the uninvited guest with just the look a dog has when his master calls him to give him a whipping.

'How do you do, Pseldonymov, do you recognize me?' said Ivan Il'ich, and at the same moment felt that he had said it very awkwardly; he also felt that perhaps at that moment he was doing something awfully silly.

'Your Ex-ex-excellency!' stammered Pseldonymov.

'Well, my friend! I came in here quite by chance—as you can probably imagine!'

But Pseldonymov evidently could not imagine anything. With staring eyes he stood there in horrible uncertainty.

'I suppose you will not turn me out. . . . Pleased or otherwise, we have to welcome our guests!' continued Ivan Il'ich, feeling that he was becoming confused to an undignified state of feebleness. He wanted to smile but could not; he felt that his humorous story about Stepan Nikiforovich and Trifon was becoming more and more impossible. All this time Pseldonymov remained immovable as if on purpose, staring at him foolishly. Ivan Il'ich became uneasy; he felt that it only wanted another such minute for the whole thing to become an incredible absurdity.

'Have I in any way disturbed—I will go away . . .,' he said in a half audible voice, and some nerve twitched in the corner of his mouth. But Pseldonymov had already recovered himself.

'Your Excellency, pardon me—an honour,' he mumbled, bowing hastily; 'have the goodness to be seated,' and recovering still further he pointed with both hands to the sofa from which the table had been removed to make room for the dancing.

Ivan Il'ich's soul was eased and he sank down on the sofa; at the same moment some one hastened to move a table towards it. He looked round and saw that he alone was seated; all the others, even the ladies, remained standing.—A bad sign!—But the

moment had not yet arrived to reassure and encourage them. The guests still retreated, and it was Pseldonymov alone who stood before him bowing low and far from smiling, for he could as yet not in the least understand what was happening. The moment was short but horrible. Our hero felt so much distress in that minute that this invasion of his subordinate's home, performed on the principles of a Haroun-al-Raschid, might well be looked upon as a heroic exploit. Suddenly another figure appeared next to Pseldonymov and began bowing too. Ivan Il'ich recognized, to his inexpressible pleasure, not to say delight, the head clerk of his department, Akim Petrovich Zubikov, with whom, of course, he was not acquainted, but whom he knew as a business-like and silent official. He at once got up and offered Akim Petrovich his hand, his whole hand and not two fingers. Akim Petrovich received it in both of his with the greatest respect. The General triumphed; the situation was saved.

In fact, from that moment Pseldonymov became, so to speak, not the second but the third person. Ivan Il'ich could now tell his story to the head clerk, accepting him at this hour of need as a friend, not to say an intimate, while Pseldonymov could stand by all the time in silence, trembling with devotion. Consequently propriety was observed. The story was necessary—Ivan Il'ich felt this; he saw that all the guests expected something, that in the two doorways all the inhabitants of the house were crowded, almost climbing on each other's shoulders to look at him and to hear him speak. The only thing that was unpleasant was that the head clerk, out of sheer stupidity, still did not sit down.

'Why do you not . . . ?' said Ivan Il'ich, awkwardly pointing to a place on the sofa next to himself.

'Excuse me, Excellency—this will do for me,' and Akim Petrovich quickly sat down on a chair which was rapidly placed for him by Pseldonymov, who himself remained stiffly standing.



'Can you imagine such an occurrence?' began Ivan Il'ich in a somewhat uneven but already confident voice, addressing himself exclusively to Akim Petrovich. He drew out his words, divided the syllables, put special stress on some letters, stopped in places, and even to himself acknowledged that he was speaking with affectation, but was unable to regain full mastery of himself; some external force seemed to act on him. At that moment he became painfully conscious of a great many things.

'—Just fancy, I had come away from Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov's—you may have heard of him, the Privy Councillor—don't you remember—on that commission . . .'

Akim Petrovich respectfully bent his whole body forward: 'I couldn't fail to know of him, sir!'

'He is now your neighbour,' continued Ivan Il'ich, and for a moment, mainly from propriety but also to relieve the strain, he turned to Pseldonymov; but he soon turned away again as he noticed by Pseldonymov's eyes that it was a matter of no consequence to him.

'An old man, as you know, who dreamed all his life of buying a house. At last he has bought one—and a very nice house too. Yes—and to-day was his birthday—he has never celebrated it before, and had even kept the date a secret from us—avoided it from stinginess! He, he! And now he was so pleased with his new house that he invited me and Semen Ivanovich—you know him—Shipulenko?'

Akim Petrovich bowed again, bowed profoundly! Ivan Il'ich was somewhat reassured. It had crossed his mind that the head clerk might perhaps guess that at that moment he was a necessary *point d'appui* for his Excellency. That would be the worst thing that could possibly happen.

'Well, we sat there, the three of us, and he gave us champagne. We talked of business, this, that, and the other—the questions of the day—we got to arguing! He, he!'

Akim Petrovich raised his eyebrows respectfully.

'But that is not the point. We took leave of him—he's a very regular old gentleman, pedantic, goes to bed early, you know—old age! We went out of the house and—my Trifon was not there. I was annoyed and made inquiries: "What has become of Trifon and my carriage?" It appeared that, expecting me to be late, he had gone off to the wedding of some *kuma* or sister—Heaven only knows who!—somewhere here on the Petersburg Side, and had taken the carriage with him!' Out of propriety the General again glanced at Pseldonymov. He duly bowed, but not at all as he should have done to a General! 'There's no sympathy in his heart,' shot through Ivan Il'ich's brain.

'Whoever heard of such a thing?' said Akim Petrovich with great astonishment, and a low murmur of surprise passed through the whole company.

'You can imagine my position,' Ivan Il'ich looked all round. 'There was nothing else to be done, so I started on foot. I thought if I could get as far as the Great Prospect I should be sure to find a *van'ka*<sup>1</sup> there. He, he!'

'Hi, hi, hi!' respectfully echoed Akim Petrovich. Again a murmur, this time of merriment, passed through the crowd. At that moment the lamp glass of one of the wall lamps broke with a great crack. Some one hurried to pick up the pieces. Pseldonymov started and looked fiercely at the lamp, but the General did not take the slightest notice of it, and quiet reigned once more.

'I am walking along—the night is so fine, so calm. Suddenly I hear music, footsteps, dancing. Out of curiosity I ask a policeman: "Pseldonymov's wedding." Yes, my friend, are you not giving a fine ball to the whole Petersburg Side? Ha, ha!'—he laughed again, turning suddenly to Pseldonymov.

'Hi, hi, hi! Yes, sir!' echoed Akim Petrovich; there was again a movement among the guests, but the stupidest part of it was that even now Pseldonymov

<sup>1</sup> The diminutive of Ivan, the name given to cab-drivers.



did not smile, although he bowed again. He seemed to be made of wood. 'He must be a fool!' thought Ivan Il'ich; 'why, a donkey would have smiled, and then all would go on swimmingly.' He became impatient. 'I thought I would look in at my subordinate's. He won't turn me out; pleased or not pleased, we have to welcome our guests, you know. Forgive me; if I am disturbing you at all, I can go away. I only came in to see. . . .'

Little by little there was a general movement. Akim Petrovich put on his sweetest smile, as if to say: 'How could your Excellency disturb us?' The guests began to move and show the first signs of freedom of manners. Most of the ladies had already sat down. The boldest of them ventured to fan themselves with their handkerchiefs—a good and positive sign. One lady in a shabby velvet dress began to speak in a loud voice. The officer to whom she addressed herself wanted to answer her in a loud voice, but as they were the only two speaking he refrained. The men, who were mostly government clerks, with a few students among them, looked about as if urging one another to be more free—coughed—even began to move a step or two in various directions. Nobody was specially awkward, but all were shy, and almost all secretly felt hostility to the person who had come to disturb their gaiety. The officer, ashamed of his pusillanimity, began gradually to approach the table.

'Listen, my friend, may I ask you what is your name and patronymic?' Ivan Il'ich asked Pseldonymov.

'Porfiry Petrov, your Excellency,' he answered, with his eyes staring as if he were on parade.

'Porfiry Petrov, won't you introduce me to your young wife? Conduct me—I . . .'

He seemed inclined to rise, but Pseldonymov hurried to the drawing-room as fast as his legs would carry him. The bride was standing at the door so he had not far to go, but as soon as she heard that the conversation had turned on her she quickly hid. In a

minute Pseldonymov returned leading her by the hand. Everybody made way for them. Ivan Il'ich ceremoniously rose from the sofa and addressed her with his most amiable smile.

'I am very, very glad to make your acquaintance,' said he with the most aristocratic inclination, 'especially on such an occasion.'

He continued to wear his stereotyped smile. The ladies were pleasantly agitated.

'*Charmée*,' said the lady in the velvet dress, almost aloud.

The bride was worthy of Pseldonymov. She was a thin little lady of barely seventeen, with a very small pale face and sharp little nose. Her small piercing eyes, that glanced rapidly about, did not appear in the slightest degree confused, but on the contrary looked fixedly at him with an expression—one might almost say—of mischief. Evidently Pseldonymov had chosen her for her beauty. She was dressed in a white muslin dress over a pink slip. Her neck was thin, her body that of a chicken, her bones all seemed to protrude. She had nothing to say in reply to the General's greeting.

'You've got a very pretty little wife,' he continued in a low voice as if only addressing Pseldonymov, but in such a way that the bride should hear him. But again Pseldonymov had nothing to say, and this time even did not bow. It seemed to Ivan Il'ich almost as if he saw something cold and concealed in his eyes, as if there were something special, something malignant on his mind. But whatever it might cost, it was necessary to get at his better feelings. That was the object of his being there.

'A fine sort of couple,' he thought. 'However—' and he again turned to the bride, making place for her on the sofa beside him; but to the two or three questions he addressed to her he again got only 'yes' or 'no' for a reply, and these words he could scarcely hear.

'If she only were a little confused,' he continued



to reflect, 'I could then venture on a joke. As it is, my position is helpless.' Even Akim Petrovich remained silent, as if on purpose; it was just stupidity, but all the same unpardonable. 'Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I have not interfered with your amusement,' he said, addressing the whole party. He felt that the palms of his hands were perspiring.

'No, no, sir! Do not trouble yourself about that, your Excellency, we shall soon begin again; we are just getting cool, sir,' answered the officer. The bride looked at him approvingly; the officer was not old and wore the uniform of some obscure detachment. Pseldonymov stood in the same place and his nose seemed to stick out farther than ever. He stood there like a lackey holding his master's fur coat and waiting for the end of his good-byes. This remark Ivan Il'ich made to himself; he began to feel lost; he had a feeling of awkwardness, of terrible awkwardness, as if the ground were slipping from under his feet, as if he had got in some place from which he could not get out, as if he were in the dark.

Suddenly every one stepped back and a short, stumpy woman appeared. She was no longer young; dressed very simply though evidently with an attempt to be smart, she had a large shawl on her shoulders, fastened at the throat, and a cap to which she seemed unaccustomed. She had in her hands a small round tray on which stood a full but already uncorked bottle of champagne and two glasses, no more and no less. The bottle was evidently destined for only two of the guests.

The elderly woman came straight up to the General.

'I beg your Excellency not to be exacting,' she said with a bow; 'since you have condescended to come to us to honour my son's wedding with your presence, do us the favour of drinking the health of the young couple. You will not refuse to do us that honour?'

Ivan Il'ich caught at her as if for salvation. She was not at all an old woman, only about forty-five or six—

not more. But she had such a good, rosy face, such an open, round, Russian countenance—she smiled so good-naturedly, bowed so simply—that Ivan Il'ich was almost comforted and began to hope again.

'So you—you are the—er—mother of your son,' he said, rising from the sofa.

'My mother, your Excellency,' mumbled Pseldonymov, stretching out his long neck and poking his nose forward.

'Ah, very pleased—very pleased to make your acquaintance.'

'Your Excellency has no objection——?'

'With the very greatest pleasure!'

The tray was placed on the table, Pseldonymov jumped forward to pour out the wine, and Ivan Il'ich, still standing, took a glass.

'I am particularly—specially glad of this opportunity, that I can—' he began '—that I may—with this express— In short, as your chief—I wish you, madam' (and he turned to the bride), 'and you, friend Porfiry—I wish you every possible prosperity and long happiness!'

And he emptied his glass with feeling; it was the seventh that evening. Pseldonymov looked serious, even gloomy. The General began to hate him heartily.

'And here's this big blockhead' (he looked at the officer) 'standing there—why doesn't he shout "Hurrah"?' Then everything would go all right.'

'And you too, Akim Petrovich, drink a glass and congratulate them,' said the old woman, turning to the head clerk. 'You are his chief, he is your subordinate. Look after my son, I ask you, for his mother's sake! Do not forget us in time to come, my dear friend, Akim Petrovich, you are such a good, kind man!'

'How charming these old Russian women are!' thought Ivan Il'ich. 'She has put life into us all. I always loved the people!'

At that moment another tray was brought and placed on the table. It was carried by a girl in a rustling chintz dress that had not yet been washed and a crinoline.



The tray was so large that she was hardly able to hold it in her two hands. On it were numberless small plates, with apples, sweets, candied fruits, fruit pastilles, nuts, and other refreshments. The tray had till then been standing in the drawing-room as refreshment for all the guests, especially the ladies, but now it was brought in for the General only.

'I hope your Excellency will not disdain our victuals! One must be content with what one has got!' said the old woman, bowing again.

'With pleasure,' said Ivan Il'ich, as he took a nut, which he broke between his fingers. He decided to make himself popular to the end.

At that moment the bride began to giggle.

'What is the joke?' asked Ivan Il'ich, pleased to see any sign of life.

'It is only Ivan Kosten'kinych making me laugh,' she answered bluntly.

The General looked round and noticed a very good-looking, fair-haired youth who was trying to hide behind a chair on the other side of the sofa, and who was whispering something to Mme. Pseldonymov. The youth got up. He was evidently very young and bashful.

'I was telling her about the Dream-book, your Excellency!' he mumbled as if to excuse himself.

'What sort of a "Dream-book"?' asked Ivan Il'ich condescendingly.

'There is a new Dream-book, sir, a fine book, sir. I told her, sir, that if one dreamed of M. Panaev, that meant one would spill coffee on one's shirt front, sir.'

'What *naïveté*!' thought Ivan Il'ich with irritation. The youth, who had become very red while he spoke, was very pleased with himself for having told this story about M. Panaev.

'Yes, yes, I have heard of it,' replied his Excellency.

'No, but there is something better still,' began another guest close to Ivan Il'ich. 'A new dictionary is being published, and it is said M. Kraevsky will write articles on Alferaki . . . and polemical litera-

ture.' This was said by a young man, who far from being confused was rather bold. He wore a white waistcoat and gloves, and had a hat in his hand. He did not dance, but looked on condescendingly, as he was on the staff of the satirical magazine, the *Firebrand*, gave tone to the company, and had come to the wedding by chance as Pseldonymov's honoured guest. The young men were on very intimate terms, having a year previously shared their poverty and the corner of a room in a lodging-house kept by a German woman. He was not averse from drinking vodka, and had already more than once absented himself for that purpose and retired to a back room, to which all knew the way. He annoyed the General very much.

'And this is amusing, sir—' interrupted the fair-haired youth who had told the story of the shirt-front, on whom the journalist in the white waistcoat looked with hatred,—'it is amusing, your Excellency, because the author assumes that M. Kraevsky does not know how to spell and thinks that "polemical literature" is written with "pa"!'

The poor youth was hardly able to finish. He saw by the General's eyes that long ago he had understood what was meant, and that the General also looked a little confused just because he knew it. The young man became incredibly ashamed of himself. He was able to efface himself somewhere and was very sad for the rest of the evening. In his place the bold journalist on the *Firebrand* came still nearer, and appeared to have the intention of taking a seat in the vicinity of the General, a liberty which seemed to Ivan Il'ich somewhat embarrassing.

'Come, Porfiry, will you tell me,' began the General for something to say—'I always wanted to ask you personally—why are you called Pseldonymov and not Pseudonymov? Surely you ought to be called Pseudonymov?'

'I can't tell you the exact reason, your Excellency,' answered Pseldonymov.

'It is probably his father, sir, when he entered the



service; there was some mistake in the papers, so that he has remained Pseldonymov,' explained Akim Petrovich, 'such things do occur, sir.'

'Cer-tain-ly,' said the General hotly. 'Cer-tain-ly, because—you can judge for yourself—Pseudonymov has its origin in the literary word "pseudonym," but Pseldonymov does not mean anything.'

'It was through stupidity, sir,' added Akim Petrovich.

'How—in what way through stupidity?'

'The Russian people, often through their stupidity, change the letters, sir, and pronounce them in their own way, sir. Take as an example they say "nevalid" when they ought to say "invalid," sir.'

'Oh, yes, "nevalid," he, he, he!'

'They also say "mumber," your Excellency,' broke in the tall officer, who had long been itching to distinguish himself.

'What do you mean by "mumber"?''

'"Mumber" instead of "number," your Excellency.'

'Oh yes, just so, "mumber" instead of "number."

. . . Oh yes, yes . . . he, he, he!' Ivan Il'ich was obliged to laugh at the officer's joke.

The officer arranged his tie.

'And they also say "bast,"' explained the contributor to the *Firebrand*, but his Excellency tried not to hear him. He was not going to laugh for everybody.

'"Bast" instead of "past,"' persisted the journalist with evident irritation.

Ivan Il'ich looked severely at him.

'Why are you making a nuisance of yourself?' whispered Pseldonymov to the journalist.

'What do you mean? I am just conversing. Can't one even speak—' the latter began to argue in a whisper, but he soon stopped and left the room in a huff.

He went straight to the attractive back room where, for the benefit of the gentlemen, there stood all the evening a small table covered with a Yaroslav linen table-cloth, on which were laid for their delectation

two sorts of vodka, a herring, pressed caviare cut into small pieces, and a bottle of the very strongest sherry from the national wine-cellar. With bitterness in his heart he had just poured himself out a glass of vodka when the medical student with the dishevelled hair rushed into the room. He was the chief dancer and leader of the dances at Pseldonymov's ball. With hasty greediness he seized the bottle.

'It's going to begin directly,' said he hurriedly, as if giving orders. 'Come and look; I shall give them a solo standing on my head, and after supper I shall risk a *can-can*. It will be just suitable for a wedding—a sort of friendly hint to Pseldonymov. She's a fine woman, that Cleopatra Semenovna; you can risk anything you like with her.'

'He's a retrograde,' the writer answered gloomily, as he emptied his glass.

'Who is a retrograde?'

'That person, the one they have just put the sweets in front of. A retrograde! . . . I assure you.'

'Get along,' mumbled the student and hurried out of the room as the ritornelle of the next quadrille was heard.

The contributor to the *Firebrand*, left alone, poured himself out another glass to strengthen his courage and independence, drank it off, and helped himself to a snack; never before had his Excellency the Privy Councillor Ivan Il'ich made for himself a more bitter enemy or a more implacable avenger than he had in the slighted collaborator of the *Firebrand*, especially after two glasses of vodka. Alas, Ivan Il'ich never suspected anything of that nature. He never even suspected another very important fact which had an influence on all the subsequent mutual relations of the guests and his Excellency. The fact is, that though he had on his side given a proper and even minute explanation of his presence at the wedding of his underling, his explanation did not really satisfy anybody, and the guests continued to feel shy. But suddenly everything changed as if by enchantment, the



company became calm and ready to enjoy themselves again, to laugh, shout, dance, just as if the unexpected guest were not in the room. The cause of it was that in an unaccountable manner a rumour, a whisper, the news gradually spread all over the room, that the guest 'seems just a little . . . '—'under the influence of . . . ' Though at first this appeared like a terrible calumny, little by little it seemed to be justified, so that at last it was all quite clear. More than that, at the same time they all felt unusually free and easy. It was at this moment that the quadrille, the last before supper, began, the dance to which the medical student hastened back.

Ivan Il'ich was just going to address the bride again, and this time he hoped to get the better of her shyness by some joke, when the tall officer came up and with a great flourish sank down on one knee before her. She at once jumped up from the sofa and fluttered away with him to take a place in the quadrille; the officer made no excuses, and she did not so much as look at the General as she went away; it seemed as if she were glad to escape from him.

'After all,' thought Ivan Il'ich, 'she had every right to do so, and one can't expect good manners from them— H'm! well, friend Porfiry, don't stand on ceremony,' he said, turning to Pseldonymov; 'perhaps there is something that requires your attention, or something perhaps that—please don't mind me, please feel no restraint. . . . Why is he standing guard over me?' he added to himself.

It became unbearable to have Pseldonymov with his long neck standing near him, and to see his staring eyes fixed attentively on him. In a word, this was not the thing, not at all the thing; but Ivan Il'ich was still far from confessing it to himself.

The quadrille began.

'Will your Excellency permit me . . . ?' asked Akim Petrovich, respectfully taking up the bottle ready to fill his Excellency's glass.

‘I—I really don’t know if——’

But Akim Petrovich with a bright smile of devotion had already poured out the champagne. Having filled one glass, he proceeded secretly and stealthily, and with many grimaces, to fill his own too, with this difference, that his own glass was about a finger-breadth less full, which seemed more respectful. Sitting next to his immediate superior he felt like a woman in labour. What was he to talk about? He was bound to amuse his Excellency, such was his duty—had he not the honour of his company? The champagne served as a resource, and indeed it proved most agreeable to his Excellency that he had poured it out—not for the sake of the champagne, for it was warm and the most ordinary mediocre stuff, but morally agreeable.

‘The old fellow wants a drink himself,’ thought Ivan Il’ich, ‘and dare not without me. Why should I stop him? It would be silly if the bottle stood between us untouched.’

He sipped his wine; it was at any rate better than sitting there doing nothing.

‘I am here—’ he began, stopping and emphasising each word: ‘I am here, as it were, by chance, and, of course, it is probable that some will consider it improper—so to speak—for me to be in such company.’

Akim Petrovich was silent and listened with timid curiosity.

‘But I hope you will understand why I am here. It is not just to drink wine that I have come! He, he!’

Akim Petrovich wanted to echo his Excellency’s laugh but missed fire, and again remained silent, not answering him a single consoling word.

‘I am here, so to speak, to approve . . . to show—so to speak—morally the object . . .’ continued Ivan Il’ich, getting vexed with Akim Petrovich’s slowness of comprehension, but suddenly he became silent too. He saw that poor Akim Petrovich lowered his eyes in a guilty way. The General in slight confusion hastily took another sip from his glass, and Akim



Petrovich, as if his whole salvation consisted in so doing, seized the bottle and refilled it.

'You certainly have not much to say,' thought Ivan Il'ich, looking sternly at poor Akim Petrovich, who, feeling the stern eyes of the General on him, decided to continue his silence and not lift his own. In this way they remained seated opposite each other for about two minutes, two very painful minutes for Akim Petrovich.

We must say just a word or so about Akim Petrovich. A man as quiet as a hen, he was of quite the old-fashioned stamp, brought up to servility, and at the same time a good and even a noble man. He was one of the Russians of Petersburg, that is to say, he and his father and his grandfather had been born and brought up and had served in Petersburg and had never once left that town; such people constitute quite a peculiar Russian type. They have hardly any knowledge of Russia and are not at all troubled at their ignorance. All their interests are concentrated on Petersburg and mainly on the office in which they are employed. All their solicitude is centred in a game of preference at copeck points, in their shop, and in their monthly salary. They do not know a single Russian custom nor a single Russian song except 'Chips,' and that only because the street organs play it. There are two essential and unfailing signs by which you can instantly distinguish a real Russian from a Petersburg Russian. The first is that no Petersburg Russian ever says 'the *Petersburg Journal*,' but always 'the *Academical Journal*'; the second and equally important sign is that they never say 'Zavtrak' (for breakfast or lunch), but always 'Frühstück,' with a special accent on the 'Früh.' By these rooted and characteristic signs you can know them anywhere. They are a humble type that has been definitely formed during the last thirty-five years. Akim Petrovich was, however, no fool. If the General had asked him about something suitable to his understanding, he would



have answered quite appositely and would have even sustained the conversation, but it would have been indecent for a subordinate to answer such questions, although Akim Petrovich was dying to know something more definite as to what his Excellency's intentions were.

In the meantime Ivan Il'ich fell more and more deeply into reflection and into a kind of confusion of ideas. From thoughtlessness and absence of mind he more and more often took a sip at his glass. Akim Petrovich lost no time in zealously filling it up again. Both men were silent. Ivan Il'ich at last began to look at the dances; before long they interested him. Suddenly something surprised him.

The dances were really very gay. Here they danced in the simplicity of their hearts, for amusement, and even with abandon. There were very few good dancers but many awkward ones, who stamped about with such vigour that they might have been taken for good. The person who distinguished himself most was the officer. He especially liked the figures where he remained the only dancer and performed a sort of solo. In this he bent about with remarkable agility; sometimes, though normally straight as a milestone, suddenly bent so much to one side that one thought he was sure to fall over, but with another step he suddenly bent to the opposite side at the same acute angle with the floor. All the time his face wore a serious expression, and he danced in the full conviction that everyone was admiring him. Another dancer went to sleep near his partner during the second figure, having had more than was good for him before the quadrille began; his lady had to dance alone. A young registrar who was dancing with the lady in the blue scarf always made the same joke in every figure and in all the five quadrilles danced that evening: he remained a little behind his partner, seized the end of her scarf, and while in the act of crossing to his vis-à-vis rapidly pressed a few dozen kisses on it. His partner floated before him



as if quite unconscious of what he was doing. The medical student, as he had promised, executed a solo on his head, and thereby caused furious delight, stampings of applause and shouts of pleasure. In a word, there was a great lack of restraint. Ivan Il'ich, the wine beginning to have an effect on him, at first smiled, but little by little a bitter feeling of doubt began to creep into his soul; of course he was very fond of unconstraint and freedom of manners—he had wanted it, had heartily invited it at the moment when they had all stepped back from him, but now this same freedom of manner seemed to be getting out of bounds. For instance, the lady in the well-worn velvet dress that she had bought not second but fourth hand fastened it with pins during the sixth figure in such a way that it looked as if she had trousers on. This lady was the Cleopatra Semenovna with whom you could risk anything, as her partner the medical student had said. There is no need to speak of the medical student, he was a regular Fokin. Why was it that a moment ago they all fell back and now were so emancipated? It might be nothing, but the change seemed strange: it predicted something. It was as if they had quite forgotten that Ivan Il'ich was in the world. Of course he was the first to laugh, and had even risked some applause. Akim Petrovich tittered in unison, though it was evidently mixed with pleasure, and he never suspected that his Excellency was beginning to nourish a new worm in his heart.

'You dance very well, young man,' Ivan Il'ich felt himself called upon to say to the student when he passed by at the end of the quadrille.

The student turned sharply round, made a grimace, and approaching his face—quite indecently close—to his Excellency's, crowed like a cock at the top of his voice. This was too much; Ivan Il'ich got up from the table. Despite this movement there was a roar of laughter, for the imitation of the crowing of a cock was very natural and the grimace so unexpected.

Ivan Il'ich was still standing there in doubt, when Pseldonymov appeared and bowing begged him to come to supper. His mother followed him.

'*Batyushka*, your Excellency,' she said bowing. 'Do us the honour—do not disdain our poverty. . . .'

'I—I—really, I don't know,' began Ivan Il'ich: 'it was not for this . . . I—I wanted to be going. . . .'

It is true he held his fur cap in his hand. Moreover, at that moment he gave himself his word of honour that he would go away at once, whatever it might cost, that nothing would induce him to stay . . . and yet he stayed. A minute later he led the procession to the supper table, Pseldonymov and his mother going before him to clear the way. He was placed in the seat of honour, and again a fresh bottle of champagne appeared before him. For *hors d'œuvres* there were herrings and vodka. He stretched out his hand, filled himself a large wine-glass of vodka, and drank it off. He had never drunk vodka before. He felt as if he were rolling down a hill—flying . . . flying . . . flying . . . that he must stop himself—catch hold of something, but there was no possibility of doing so. . . .

In fact, his position became more and more eccentric. More than that, it seemed to be a sort of mockery of fate. God only knows what had happened to him in the space of an hour. When he had entered the house he had stretched out his arms, so to speak, to embrace the whole of humanity and all who were subordinate to him; and now hardly an hour later he felt and knew with pain in his heart that he could not bear Pseldonymov, and cursed him, his wife, and his wedding. Not only this, but he also saw in Pseldonymov's face, in his eyes, that he too could not bear his chief; he looked, almost said: 'Go to the devil, you damned old creature! What brought you here to sit on my shoulders?' He had long ago read all this in Pseldonymov's eyes.

Of course Ivan Il'ich, as he sat down to table, would



sooner have had his hand chopped off than confess honestly aloud, or even to himself, that it had really turned out in the way it had. That moment had not yet arrived; he was still in a sort of moral equilibrium. But his heart—in his heart there were gnawings. It wanted to be free, to escape into the air, to rest. Ivan Il'ich was indeed too good a man.

He knew, yes, he knew very well that he ought long ago to have left, not only to have left but really to have escaped and saved himself; that everything was suddenly turning out not in the way, not at all in the way, he had planned while walking on the boarded footpath.

'Why did I come here? Did I come here to eat and drink?' he asked himself as he ate the herring. He had arrived at a state of negation. There were moments when in his heart of hearts he looked ironically at his own action. He began not to understand why he had come at all!

'How could he go away now? To go away before he had accomplished what he wanted to do was impossible. What would people say? They would say that I haunt improper places. It certainly would seem like that if I did not finish what I came for. What will they say to-morrow (because, of course, it will be talked of everywhere)—what will Stepan Nikiforovich, Semen Ivanovich, say—what will be said in the Chancery, at Shembel's, at Shubin's? No, I must leave in such a way that they will all understand why I came, I must reveal my moral intention.'

But unfortunately the psychological moment would not present itself. 'They do not even respect me,' he continued to think. 'What are they laughing at? They are so free—as if they have no feelings . . . Yes, I have long suspected that the whole of the younger generation is feelingless! I must stay, whatever it may cost me. Now they are dancing, but at supper they will all be collected together . . . I shall talk of the questions of the day—of reforms—of the greatness of Russia . . . I may yet carry them

with me! Yes, perhaps nothing is lost as yet. Perhaps it is always thus in reality. How ought I to begin so as to interest them? What turn should I give to the conversation? I feel lost . . . quite lost. And what do they want, what do they need? I see that they are laughing among themselves. Surely not at me? Good Lord!—what do I want? Why am I here? Why don't I go away? What do I expect to accomplish?' Such were his thoughts, and a sort of shame, a sort of deep, unbearable shame began to tear at his heart.

Thus things moved on, one step leading to another.

It was just two minutes after he had taken his seat at the table that a terrible thought seized hold of his whole person. He suddenly felt horribly drunk, that is to say, not tipsy as he was before but completely drunk. The cause of it was the glass of vodka he had drunk just after champagne, which instantly took effect. He felt and perceived in his whole being that he was becoming positively feeble. Of course his courage increased greatly, but his consciousness did not desert him and cried to him: 'It is wrong, very wrong, absolutely indecent.' Of course his wandering drunken thoughts could not remain fixed on any one point: there appeared in him suddenly, quite tangibly, two opposite sides: on the one side was swagger, the desire to conquer and to destroy all obstacles, and a foolhardy certitude of being able to attain his object; the other side made itself felt by a painful melancholy of the soul and a sort of sinking of the heart: 'What will they say? How will all this end? What will happen to-morrow—to-morrow—to-morrow?'

Earlier in the evening he had had a dull presentiment that he had enemies among the guests. 'It must be because I was drunk when I came,' he thought with torturing doubt. What then was his horror when he now became convinced by unmistakable signs that some of those at the table were really his enemies and that this fact could no longer be doubted!



‘And why? What can be the reason?’ he wondered.

All the guests, about thirty in number, were seated at the table, some of them already quite done for. The others behaved in a very careless, malignant, independent manner, shouted, spoke in very loud voices, proposed toasts at the wrong moment, and bombarded the ladies with little pills of bread. One very ill-favoured personage in a dirty frock-coat fell off his chair at the beginning of supper and remained on the floor till the end of it. Another wanted to get on the table to propose a toast, and it was only the officer who, by pulling at his coat-tails, managed to check his premature excitement. The supper was quite plebeian, although a chef, the slave of some general, had been hired to prepare it; there was a galantine, tongue and potatoes, cutlets and green peas; there was also a goose, and, to finish up with, blanc-mange. The drinks were—beer, vodka, and sherry. The only bottle of champagne stood before the General, which obliged him to pour it out for himself, as Akim Petrovich did not dare to act on his own initiative at supper. The toasts had to be drunk by the other guests in bitters or whatever came to hand. The table was composed of a number of small tables placed side by side, including a card table, and they were covered with several small table-cloths, one of which was a Yaroslav coloured one. The guests sat alternately ladies and gentlemen. Pseldonymov’s mother would not sit down, but moved about seeing that all was in order and that everybody was served. Instead, a malignant-looking female, with a tied-up face, who had not appeared before, came forward in a sort of red silk gown and high cap. She proved to be the bride’s mother, who had at last agreed to come out of some back room to the supper. Until that moment she had not appeared owing to her irreconcilable enmity with Pseldonymov’s mother; but of this we shall speak later. This lady looked at the General with animosity and even with derision,



and evidently did not want to be introduced to him. This female seemed to Ivan Il'ich to be highly suspicious. There were also others who seemed to him suspicious, and suggested involuntarily danger and uneasiness. They seemed to be forming a sort of conspiracy against him. In any case, that is how it appeared to him, and the whole of supper he became more and more convinced that it was so. For instance, there was one malignant-looking gentleman with a small beard, an artist of some kind, who looked at Ivan Il'ich several times, and then turned to his neighbour and whispered something in his ear. Another, a student, who it must be confessed was quite drunk, showed nevertheless some suspicious signs. There were small hopes of the medical student; even the officer was not to be relied upon. But quite special and evident hatred shone from the eyes of the journalist: he had such a way of lolling in his chair, such a proud and arrogant manner of looking at him, and sniffed with such independence. Although the other guests paid no attention to the 'journalist,' who had only written four lines of verse for the *Firebrand* and had consequently become a liberal: although, too, it was evident that he was not liked by them, still when a small bullet of bread, clearly aimed at him, fell near Ivan Il'ich, he was ready to have his head chopped off if the guilty thrower of that bullet was not the gentleman on the *Firebrand*.

All this had a most lamentable effect on him.

There was still another observation that was specially unpleasant for him. Ivan Il'ich became quite convinced that there was beginning to be a want of distinctness in his words; it was hard to pronounce them; there was much he wanted to say, but his tongue would not move; also, that from time to time he began to forget himself, and above all that for no reason he would suddenly sniff and then laugh, although there was nothing to laugh at. This disposition soon passed away after drinking a glass of champagne; although Ivan Il'ich had poured it out for himself,



he did not want to drink it, but suddenly emptied it quite unintentionally. After this glass he almost wanted to cry. He felt that he was falling into the most sentimental sensitiveness; he again began to love, to love all, even Pseldonymov, even the journalist. He wanted to embrace them, to embrace them all, to forget and be reconciled with them all. Not only that; but he wanted to speak to them quite openly, to tell them everything; that is to say, what a good and kind man he was, and what splendid abilities he possessed. How useful he would be to his country, how well he could amuse the ladies, and above all, what a progressive man he was, how humanely he was ready to condescend to anyone, even the very lowest, and finally, in conclusion, to tell them quite openly the motives that had induced him to come uninvited to Pseldonymov's wedding, drink two bottles of his champagne, and make him happy by his presence.

'The truth, the sacred truth, above all, and frankness. I will win them by frankness. They will believe me, all is clear to me; they are looking at me with enmity now, but when I tell them all, I shall conquer them irresistibly. They will fill their glasses and with shouts drink my health. The officer, I am sure, will break his glass on his spur. Perhaps they will even shout hurrah! Perhaps if they think of tossing me, as the Hussars do, I would not resist that; it would be a very good thing. I shall kiss the bride on the forehead; she's a pretty little thing. Akim Petrovich is also a very nice man. Pseldonymov will of course get better in time. He only wants, so to speak, the polish of the world. . . . And although that sincere delicacy is certainly wanting in the whole of the new generation, yet—yet I shall tell them of the new destiny of Russia among the other European powers. I will also mention the peasant question and . . . and they will all love me and I shall leave the house with glory!'

These thoughts certainly were very pleasant, but

what was unpleasant was that, in the midst of all these rosy hopes, Ivan Il'ich suddenly discovered in himself an unexpected ability, that of spitting. In any case his spittle seemed to jump out of his mouth quite against his will. He observed it first of all on Akim Petrovich, whose cheek he had sprinkled, and who, out of respect, sat still and did not dare to wipe it off; Ivan Il'ich took a napkin and did so for him. But as he did it, it seemed to him so absurd, so far removed from common sense, that he became silent and began to wonder. Akim Petrovich, though he too had had some drink, sat there like a plucked chicken. Ivan Il'ich realised now that he had been talking to him for nearly a quarter of an hour on a most interesting subject, and that while Akim Petrovich listened to him, he seemed to be confused, not to say alarmed at something. Pseldonymov, who was sitting one chair away from him, also stretched out his long neck, and, with his head on one side, seemed to be listening to him with a most unpleasant expression on his face. He really seemed to be keeping guard on him. Casting his eyes on the guests he observed that many of them were looking straight at him and laughing. But, what was strangest of all, this did not make him feel in the least confused; on the contrary, after taking another sip at his glass, he began to talk in a voice that could be heard by all present.

'I have just said,' he began in a very loud voice, 'I have just said, ladies and gentlemen, to Akim Petrovich, that Russia—especially Russia . . . in short, you understand what I—I—I want to—to say. Russia is passing through, to my profoundest conviction, hu-hu-humaneness. . . .'

'Hu-humaneness' was echoed from the other side of the table.

'Hu-hu!'

'Tu-tu!'

Ivan Il'ich stopped. Pseldonymov jumped up from his chair and began looking round to see who had cried out. Akim Petrovich stealthily shook his head



as if to admonish the guests. Ivan Il'ich saw this clearly, but obstinately took no notice of it.

'Humaneness!' he continued emphatically; 'not long ago . . . just so—not long ago I said to Stepan Niki-ki-forovich . . . yes . . . that—that the renewal, so to speak, of things——'

'Your Excellency!' somebody called out very loud from the other end of the table.

'What can I do for you?' answered Ivan Il'ich, interrupting his speech and trying to see who had called to him.

'Nothing at all, your Excellency, I was carried away; go on! go-go-go on!' the same voice answered. Ivan Il'ich drew himself together.

'The renewal, so to speak, of these very things.'

'Your Excellency!' called the same voice.

'What do you want?'

'How do you do?'

This time Ivan Il'ich could stand it no longer. He broke off his speech and turned to this disturber of the order, to this offender. He was quite a young schoolboy who had got very drunk, and who aroused in him great suspicions. For a long time he had been shouting, and had broken a glass and two plates, affirming that it was the proper thing to do at weddings. At the moment that Ivan Il'ich turned to him the officer was just beginning to rebuke this shouter soundly.

'What do you mean by this behaviour? why are you shouting? You ought to be kicked out!'

'It's not about you, your Excellency, not about you! proceed!' cried the tipsy schoolboy, falling back on his chair. 'I am listening, and am very, ve-ry, ve-ry much satisfied with you. It is praiseworthy—most pr-praiseworthy?'

'A drunken schoolboy!' said Pseldonymov in a whisper.

'I see that he is drunk, but——'

'I have just told an amusing story, your Excellency!' began the officer, 'about a young lieutenant of our

regiment who talked in the same way to his superiors. This young man is imitating him. At every word his superior said he repeated "Praiseworthy, praiseworthy!" It was that got him discharged from the service ten years ago.'

'Wha—wh—at lieutenant was it?'

'One in our regiment, your Excellency. He was mad on praising. At first he was admonished gently, but afterwards he was put under arrest. The chief treated him as a parent would, but he only said, "Praiseworthy, praiseworthy!" And strange to say, this officer was a manly fellow—over six foot. At first they wanted to have him tried, but remarked that he was insane.'

'So he's a schoolboy. Well, for schoolboy tricks one need not be very strict. I on my part am ready to forgive . . .'

'There was a medical examination, your Excellency.'

'So they dis-sec-ted him?'

'Good gracious, he was quite alive, sir!'

The guests, who had till then behaved very correctly, greeted this remark with loud and general peals of laughter. Ivan Il'ich became fierce.

'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' he cried, not stuttering at first. 'I am quite in a position to be able to understand that one does not dissect a live man. I thought that owing to his madness he was no longer alive—that is to say, was dead. . . . That is, I wanted to say . . . that you do not love me . . . while I love you all. Yes, I even love Por—Porfiry. . . . I am demeaning myself by speaking in this way. . . .'

At that moment a large bit of spittle fell from Ivan Il'ich's lips on to the table-cloth on a most visible spot. Pseldonymov hurriedly wiped it up with his napkin. This last misfortune completely crushed him.

'Gentlemen, this is too much!' he cried in despair.

'The man is drunk, your Excellency,' Pseldonymov repeated again.

'Porfiry! I see that you . . . all . . . yes! I



say that I hope—yes, I ask you all to say: In what way have I demeaned myself?’

Ivan Il'ich was almost crying.

‘Your Excellency, how can you think such a thing, sir?’

‘Porfiry, I appeal to you . . . Tell me: if I came—yes, yes—to the wedding . . . I had an object. I wanted to raise morally . . . I wanted you to feel . . . I appeal to you all. Have I lowered myself much in your eyes or not?’

There was a dead silence. That is just it: there was dead silence, and to such a categorical question too! ‘Well, what would it have cost them to shout at such a moment?’ shot through his Excellency’s head. But the guests only looked at each other. Akim Petrovich sat there more dead than alive, while Pseldonymov, dumber than ever from fear, repeated to himself the terrible question that had long been haunting him: ‘What shall I get for all this to-morrow?’

Suddenly the contributor to the *Firebrand*, who, although very drunk already, had been sitting all the time in gloomy silence, addressed himself frankly to Ivan Il'ich, and with flashing eyes began to answer him in the name of the whole party.

‘Yes,’ he shouted in a loud voice, ‘yes, sir, you have lowered yourself—yes, sir, you are a retrograde. —Ret-ro-gra-de.’

‘Young man, remember whom you dare to address in that way,’ cried Ivan Il'ich, jumping up from his chair in a fury.

‘I am addressing you and I am not a young man! You came here to give yourself airs and to court popularity!’

‘Pseldonymov, what is this?’ cried Ivan Il'ich.

Pseldonymov jumped up in such a fright that he stopped as still as a post, and did not know what to do. The guests were struck dumb in their places. The artist and the schoolboys applauded and shouted, ‘Bravo! Bravo!’

The journalist continued to shout with irresistible fury :

'Yes, you came here to boast of your humaneness ! You have upset everyone's enjoyment. You have been drinking champagne without a thought that it was too expensive for a government clerk on a salary of ten roubles a month. I suspect that you are one of those chiefs who regard the young wives of their subordinates as toothsome morsels. More than that—I am sure you support the spirit monopoly ! Yes, yes, yes !'

'Pseldonymov, Pseldonymov !' cried Ivan Il'ich, stretching his arms towards him. He felt that every word the writer said was a fresh dagger in his heart.

'All right, your Excellency, directly ; please do not be uneasy, sir,' said Pseldonymov with energy, and going up to the gentleman of the *Firebrand*, took him by the coat-collar and dragged him away from the table. It was quite incredible that a weakling like Pseldonymov could show so much physical strength, but the journalist was very drunk, and Pseldonymov quite sober. He gave him several blows in the back and pushed him out of the door.

'You are a lot of scoundrels !' shouted the journalist. 'I will caricature you all to-morrow in the *Firebrand* !'

The whole party jumped up from their places.

'Your Excellency, your Excellency !' cried Pseldonymov and his mother, and several of the guests surrounding the General, 'Your Excellency, pray be calm !'

'No, no !' cried the General. 'I am ruined ! I came here . . . I wanted—so to speak—to baptise . . . And this is what's come of it—what's come of it !'

He fell back in his chair, almost unconscious, and put his two arms on the table ; his head sank on them straight into a plate of blanc-mange. Nothing can describe the general consternation. A minute later he arose, evidently in the desire to go away, but



he staggered, tripped over the leg of a chair, fell down full length on the floor, and began to snore. . . .

Indeed, this does happen to sober people when they accidentally get drunk. To the last stroke, to the last moment they retain consciousness, and then suddenly fall as if mown down. Ivan Il'ich lay on the floor, having lost all consciousness. Pseldonymov clutched at his hair, struck dumb at the situation, the guests began hastily to disperse, each commenting on the occurrence in his own way. It was already three o'clock.

The chief thing is that Pseldonymov was in a much worse position than one would suppose, even when judging it by all the unattractiveness of the present surroundings. While Ivan Il'ich is lying on the floor and Pseldonymov standing near him tearing his hair in desperation, we will break the thread of our story for a moment to give a few words of explanation about Porfiry Petrovich Pseldonymov.

It was not more than a month before his wedding that he was near being irretrievably lost. He came from some distant government where his father had held a small post and had died while awaiting his trial for some offence. About five months before his wedding Pseldonymov, after nearly starving in Petersburg for a whole year, obtained his appointment at a ten rouble salary, and he seemed as one risen from the dead, in body and mind, only to be soon crushed again by circumstances. He and his mother, who had left their provincial town after his father's death, were quite alone in the world. The mother and son nearly perished in the frost, feeding on all sorts of questionable victuals. There were even days when Pseldonymov went with a mug to the Fontanka to get a drink of water there. When he got his job he and his mother managed to live somehow in the corner of a room. She went out washing, and he by dint of strict economy succeeded in scraping together in four months enough to get boots and a warm coat. The misery he had to

endure in his office too : his chief asked him when he had last been to the Russian baths. It was whispered that under the collar of his uniform a whole nest of bugs were housed. But Pseldonymov had a strong character. In appearance he was meek and quiet, he had received but little education, and he was hardly ever heard to talk. I don't know if he ever thought, if he ever made plans or formed systems, if he ever reflected on anything. But in place of this a sort of instinctive, wriggling, unconscious determination to extricate himself from his evil circumstances and put himself on a better footing developed in his mind. He had the tenacity of the ant ; if you destroy an ant's nest, they at once begin to repair it ; you destroy it again, and they again recommence building it up, and so on unceasingly. He was a constructive and domesticated creature. It was written on his forehead that he would make his way, build his nest, and perhaps even lay up a store. His mother was the only creature in the whole world who loved him, but she loved him passionately. She was a strong, untiring, hard-working woman, but at the same time kind. It is probable that they would have continued to live in their corner for five or six years more in the hopes of better times if they had not met the retired Titular Councillor Mlekopitaev, who had been treasurer in a government office in the little town they came from, but had since retired and settled down with his family in Petersburg. He knew Pseldonymov and had been under some sort of obligation to his father. He had not much money, of course, but he had somehow much nobody knew, not even his wife, nor his eldest daughter, nor his relations. He had two daughters, and as he was very obstinate, a drunkard and domestic tyrant, and besides this an invalid, he decided to marry one of his daughters to Pseldonymov. 'I know him,' he said ; 'his father was a good man, and the son will be a good man too.' Whatever Mlekopitaev wanted to do he did ; once said, it must be done. He was a strangely obstinate man. He



passed most of his time sitting in an arm-chair, as he was deprived of the use of his legs by some sort of illness, which, however, did not prevent him from drinking vodka. He spent whole days drinking and swearing. He was a malicious man who always had to be worrying some one. For this purpose he had several distant female relatives living in his house—his sister, a sick and quarrelsome woman, two of his wife's sisters, both bad-tempered and long-tongued, and besides these his old aunt, who had somehow broken a rib. He also kept in his house a Russified German for the talent she had of relating stories out of the *Arabian Nights*. His only pleasure was to bully these unfortunate women, who lived on his charity, to swear at them every minute for everything under the sun, and none of them, not even his wife, who had been born with a chronic toothache, ever dared answer him a word. He tried to make them quarrel among themselves, invented and encouraged all sorts of tale-bearing and dissensions, and then laughed with delight when he saw them quarrelling and almost at blows. He was very glad when his eldest daughter, who had lived in miserable poverty for ten years with her officer husband, became a widow and returned with her three sickly little children to live with him. He could not bear her children, but as with their appearance the number of victims on whom he could try his daily experiments increased, the old man was very much delighted. All this crowd of malicious women and sick children were huddled together with their torturer in this small wooden house on the Petersburg Side. They were under-fed, because the old man was miserly and only gave out money by kopecks, though he never grudged it for his vodka; they never had sleep enough because the old man could not sleep and required to be amused. In a word, they all were miserable and cursed their fate. It was at that time that Mlekopitaev first saw Psel-donymov. He was surprised at his long nose and humble manners. His plain and sickly youngest daughter was then just seventeen. She had gone at

one time to some German school, but she never learned much more than her letters. She had grown up, scrofulous and anæmic, under the crutch of her crippled and drunken father, in the uproar of domestic quarrels, tale-bearings, spyings, and slanders. She never had any companions, nor any sense either. She had long wanted to get married. In company she was silent, but at home with her mother and their hangers-on she was malicious and as sharp as a gimlet. She especially loved to pinch and slap her sister's children, to tell tales about them, how they stole sugar and bread, which caused never-ending disputes between her and her elder sister. The old man himself proposed that Pseldonymov should marry her. Wretched though his condition was he still asked for a little time to reflect. He and his mother consulted long together. The house was to be transferred to the bride's name, and though it was a small one, and a wooden one, and a bad one, all the same it was worth something; and besides that, the old man promised four hundred roubles—when could one collect as much oneself? 'Do you know why I want to take a man into the house?' cried the obstinate old drunkard. 'First because you are all women, and I am tired of women. I want him too to dance to my fiddle, because I am his benefactor. Secondly, I take him in because you all don't want it and are angry. I do it to pay you out. What I say I will do. And you, Porfiry, thrash her when she becomes your wife; ever since she was born she has had seven devils in her. Drive them all out and I'll prepare a crutch!'

Pseldonymov remained silent, but he had already made up his mind. He and his mother had been taken into the house before the wedding; they were washed, and dressed, and shod, and given money for the wedding. The old man took them under his protection, perhaps because the whole family was against them. Pseldonymov's old mother pleased him so much that he even refrained from bullying her. As for Pseldonymov, a week before the wedding he



made him dance a *kazachek* for his amusement. 'Well, that's enough,' said he at the end of the dance; 'I only wanted to see if you would not forget yourself before me.' He gave them scarcely enough money to pay for the wedding and then invited all his relations and friends. From Pseldonymov's side the only people asked were the writer for the *Firebrand* and Akim Petrovich, the honoured guest. Pseldonymov knew very well that the bride looked upon him with aversion, and wanted to marry the officer, not him. But he put up with everything as it had been arranged with his mother. The whole of the wedding day and the whole evening the old man sat drinking and using the very worst language. Owing to the wedding all the family had to take refuge in the back rooms, and were squeezed together so that the air grew foul. The front rooms were arranged for the ball and the supper. At last, when at about eleven o'clock the old man fell asleep, dead drunk, the bride's mother, who had been especially angry with Pseldonymov's mother all day, made up her mind to lay aside her anger, replace it by graciousness, and appear at the ball and supper. The arrival of Ivan Il'ich had changed everything. Mrs. Mlekopitaev became shy; she was offended, and stormed at them all because she had not been informed that the General himself had been invited. She was assured that he had come unasked, but she was so stupid that she did not believe it. It was thought necessary to serve champagne. Pseldonymov's mother had only one rouble, Pseldonymov himself had not a kopeck, so they had to bow down to cross old Mrs. Mlekopitaev and ask her for money first for one bottle of champagne, then for another. They represented to her all the future advantages for Pseldonymov in his official career, the connexion and the rest—they persuaded her at last and she gave the money, but she made Pseldonymov drink such a cup of gall and bitterness that several times during the evening he had to run away to the little room where the bridal bed, destined for the delights of Paradise,

had been prepared, and throwing himself on it silently tear his hair while he trembled all over with impotent rage. Yes, Ivan Il'ich did not know what the two bottles of champagne he drank that evening had cost. Imagine Pseldonymov's horror, distress, and despair when this incident with Ivan Il'ich came to such an unexpected end. He saw before him again all sorts of trouble, perhaps for the whole night—the screams and tears of the capricious bride; the reproaches of the bride's stupid mother. His head was aching already, his eyes were blinded by bad air and darkness, and here was Ivan Il'ich requiring assistance. Now, at three o'clock in the morning, it was necessary to find a doctor, or a carriage to take him home, and it must be a carriage, because it would be impossible to send such a personage home in a simple *van'ka* in the state he was in. But where was he to find the money for a carriage? Old Mrs. Mlekopitaev, enraged that the General had not said two words to her nor even looked at her the whole of supper, declared that she had not a kopeck. It is quite possible that she had really not a kopeck, but where was it to be found? What was he to do? There really was some reason for him to tear his hair.

In the meantime Ivan Il'ich had been placed on a little leather sofa that stood in the dining-room. While the others were clearing the things away and separating the tables, Pseldonymov went about trying to collect money from all sides—he even tried to borrow from the servant—but nobody had any. He risked asking Akim Petrovich, who had stayed longer than the others. But he, kind as he was, at the sound of money became so perplexed, one may say so frightened, that he talked all sorts of unexpected nonsense. 'Another time, with pleasure,' he mumbled, 'but now, I must beg to be excused.' And taking up his cap he hurried out of the house. Only the kind-hearted youth who had told the story about the interpreter of dreams was of some little if untimely assistance. He also remained longer



than the others, as he took a sincere interest in Pseldonymov's misfortunes. At last Pseldonymov, his mother, and the youth decided, after a consultation, that it would be better not to send for a doctor, but only a carriage to take the invalid home, and for the present, until the carriage arrived, to take some simple homely measures to bring him to, such as wetting his head and temples with cold water, applying ice to the crown of his head, and so on. Pseldonymov's mother undertook to see to this. The youth ran off to look for a carriage. As at that time of night it was difficult to find even a *van'ka* on the Petersburg Side, he had to go some distance to a mews to rouse up a coachman. Then began a long bargaining; the coachman said that at such an hour of the night five roubles would be too little to take for a carriage, but at length he agreed to come for three. But when the youth, at nearly four o'clock, arrived in the carriage at Pseldonymov's, they had already changed their minds. It appeared that Ivan Il'ich, who was still unconscious, had become so ill, had groaned so much, and thrown himself about so wildly that it would be quite impossible to move him; and to take him home in such a condition might be dangerous. 'What will be the end of it all?' asked Pseldonymov, quite discouraged. What was to be done? A new question arose: if the invalid was to be kept in their house, where were they to put him, where was he to be carried to? In the whole house there were only two beds, one a large double bed, in which old Mlekopitaev and his wife slept, the other was a new imitation walnut double bedstead, which had been bought lately and destined for the young couple. All the other inhabitants of the house slept on the floor, lying side by side mostly on feather beds, which were worn and smelly and highly unsuitable, and even of these there were only just enough for them all, and hardly that. Where could they put the invalid? A feather bed might yet be found, some one might give hers up, but then where to put it? It was decided that the bed must be made up in the drawing-room, as it was

farthest away from the rest of the family and had a separate exit. But on what was the bed to be made up? Would it be possible on chairs? It is well known that only grammar-school boys who come home for the week-end are made to sleep on chairs; but for a personage like Ivan Il'ich it would be very disrespectful. What would he say to-morrow when he found himself lying on chairs? Pseldonymov would not hear of it. There was only one thing left to be done — to carry him to the bridal couch. This bridal couch, as we have already said, had been arranged in a little room off the dining-room. On the bedstead was a recently bought mattress that had never been used, clean bed linen, four pillows in rose-coloured calico slips under flounced muslin covers, and a coverlet of pink satin quilted in an elaborate pattern. From a gilt ring above the bed hung muslin curtains. In a word, it was all as it ought to be for a bride, and the guests, who had nearly all been in the room, had admired the arrangements. The bride, who could not bear Pseldonymov, had several times during the evening come stealthily into the room to look at it. What was her indignation and her anger when she heard that they wanted to carry the invalid, who had been attacked with something like cholera, and put him in her bridal bed! The bride's mamma took her part, scolded, and threatened to complain next day to her husband, but Pseldonymov showed his authority and insisted on it. Ivan Il'ich was carried to the bed, and a feather bed was made up for the young couple in the drawing-room. The bride whined and was ready to pinch, but did not dare disobey. Her papa had a crutch with which she was well acquainted, and she knew very well that the next day papa would require a report about certain things. To comfort her they brought into the drawing-room the pink satin quilt and the pillows with their muslin covers. At that moment the youth arrived with the carriage; hearing that it was no longer required he was terribly frightened. He would be



obliged to pay for it, and he had never had a twenty-kopeck piece in his pocket. Pseldonymov declared himself completely bankrupt. They tried to persuade the *izvozhik*, but he began to make a row and even to knock at the shutters. How this all finished I don't quite know. I believe the youth went as a prisoner in the carriage to the Peski<sup>1</sup> to the fourth Rozhdestvenskaya street, where he hoped to wake up a student, who was passing the night with some friends, in the expectation of getting some money from him. It was already five o'clock when the young couple were left alone, locked up in the drawing-room. Pseldonymov's mother remained for the night near the bed of the sufferer. She lay down on a carpet on the floor and covered herself up with her fur cloak, but she could not sleep, as she had constantly to get up; Ivan Il'ich was very sick. Pseldonymov's mother was a very magnanimous and brave woman; she undressed him, took off all his clothes, and looked after him as if he had been her own son, and the whole night she had to carry the necessary vessel out of the room and bring it in again. However, the misfortunes of this night were even yet not over.

Ten minutes had hardly passed from the moment the young couple were locked up alone in the drawing-room when suddenly a piercing cry was heard, not a cry of joy but a cry of a most evil kind, and immediately afterwards the cracking noise of falling and breaking chairs. In an instant an unexpected crowd of sighing and frightened women, in all stages of undress, rushed into the still darkened room. These women were the bride's mother, her elder sister, who had deserted her sick children for the time, and her three aunts, including the one with the broken rib. The cook was there too, and the German woman with the talent for telling stories, from under whom her feather bed had been taken by force for the use of the young couple (it

<sup>1</sup> The Peski, a part of Petersburg where the streets are numbered as in New York.



was the best one in the house and her own and only property), came along with the rest. All these respectable and sharp-sighted women had already a quarter of an hour earlier found their way through the kitchen and passage on tiptoe and had been listening in the lobby, eaten up by a quite incomprehensible curiosity. When somebody lighted a candle they saw an unexpected sight. The chairs, which only supported the broad feather-bed at the sides, had separated under the double weight and the feather bed had fallen between them to the floor. The bride was whimpering with anger; this time she was insulted to the heart. Pseldonymov, morally a dead man, stood there like a criminal taken in an act of crime. He did not even try to defend himself. 'Ah's' and 'Oh's' and other cries were uttered on all sides. Hearing the noise Pseldonymov's mother came running in, but this time the bride's mother had a complete victory. She began by assailing Pseldonymov with strange and mostly quite unjust reproaches, saying, 'What sort of a husband are you, sir, after this? What are you fit for, sir, after this disgrace?' and so on, ending by taking her daughter by the hand and leading her away from her husband to her own room, taking on herself all the responsibility of the explanation that the fierce old father would require on the morrow. All the others went after her sighing and shaking their heads. Only his mother remained and tried to console Pseldonymov, but he at once sent her away too.

He did not require consolation. He went to the sofa and sat down as he was, barefoot and only in the most indispensable under-linen, in a fit of the most morose irresolution. His thoughts crossed and re-crossed and got mixed in his head. Sometimes he mechanically looked round the room where so lately there had been such wild dancing and where the air was still full of the fumes of tobacco. Cigarette-ends and papers from sweets still littered the besprinkled and dirty floor. The ruined bridal couch and the overturned chairs bore witness to the instability of the very



best and truest of earthly hopes and dreams. He sat thinking thus for nearly an hour. Only heavy thoughts came to his mind, such as, what awaited him now in his office? He was painfully conscious that he would have to change the place of his employment, however much it cost him; it would be impossible to stay in the same office after the events of the past night. He thought of Mlekopitaev, who next day might again make him dance a *kazachek* to test his meekness. He remembered that although Mlekopitaev had given fifty roubles to defray the expenses of the wedding, which had all been spent to the last kopeck, he had not given him the four hundred roubles promised as dowry, nor had there been any further mention of them. Even the house had not as yet been legally transferred. He also thought of his wife, who had abandoned him at the most critical moment of his life; he thought of the tall officer who had gone down on one knee before her. He had had time to notice this. He thought of the seven devils that were in his wife according to the testimony of her own father, and of the crutch that was prepared to drive them out. Of course he felt that he had the strength to bear much, but fate had, after all, heaped on him so many surprises that in the end he began to doubt his own strength.

Such were Pseldonymov's sad thoughts. In the meantime the candle end burnt out, and its dying light falling straight on Pseldonymov's profile cast its shadow in a colossal shape on the wall, with his long neck and large hooked nose and two locks of hair sticking out from his forehead and the back of his head. At last, when the coolness of morning began to make itself felt, he got up shivering and numbed in body and soul, went as far as the feather bed that was lying between the chairs, and without arranging anything, without blowing out the candle, without even putting a pillow under his head, crawled on all fours on the bed and fell asleep with the leaden, dead sleep of those who are condemned the next day to a public execution.



On the other hand what could compare with the night of agony passed by Ivan Il'ich Pralinski on poor Pseldonymov's marriage bed? For some time pains in the head, vomitings, and other unpleasant attacks did not leave him for a moment. These were hellish sufferings, but the consciousness that visited his mind only in flashes lighted up such hosts of terrors, such gloomy, repulsive pictures, that it was better he should not come to himself. Confusion still reigned in his head. He recognized Pseldonymov's mother, heard her mild exhortations, of this kind—'Be patient, ducky—be patient, my dear—what can't be cured must be endured'—he recognized her but could give himself no logical reason for her being there. He had all sorts of disgusting visions: most often he saw Semen Ivanovich, but when he looked more attentively he observed that it was not Semen Ivanovich at all but Pseldonymov's nose. The free artist, the officer, and the old woman with the tied-up face all flitted before him. The thing that interested him most of all was the gilt ring hanging from the ceiling from which the muslin curtains were suspended. He could see it quite distinctly by the faint glimmer of the candle-end which alone gave light to the room, and he was always trying to understand what was the object of that ring, why it was there, what it meant. Several times he asked the old woman about it, but evidently he said something different from what he wanted to say, for he could not make her understand, however much he tried to explain what he wanted. At last towards morning the attacks ceased and he fell asleep, and slept soundly without dreams. He slept for about an hour, and when he awoke he was almost fully conscious, with only an unbearable pain in his head and the worst of tastes in the mouth and on his tongue, which seemed like a bit of cloth. He sat up in bed, looked round, and tried to think. The faint light of the breaking day that came through the shutters in a narrow streak trembled on the wall. It was about



seven o'clock in the morning. But when Ivan Il'ich suddenly remembered and understood all that had happened to him the evening before; when he remembered all the incidents of supper, his unsuccessful exploit, his speech at table; when he realized with terrible clearness what might result from all this, what people would think and say about him; when he looked round and saw, at last, to what a sad and unseemly state he had reduced the peaceful marriage couch of his subordinate; oh, then such deadly shame, such torture, seized his heart that he cried out and covering his face with his hands fell back on the pillow in despair! About a minute later he jumped out of bed, saw that his clothes were all lying on a chair well cleaned and neatly folded, and hastily seizing them, began hurriedly to dress, looking round as if in fear of something horrible. Here, too, on another chair were his fur coat and his fur cap with his yellow gloves lying in it. He wanted to slip away unobserved, but suddenly the door opened and Pseldonymov's old mother entered, bringing an earthenware basin and jug. She had a towel hanging over her shoulder. She put the basin down, and without further ceremony told him that he must wash first.

'This will never do, *Batyushka*<sup>1</sup>; you must wash—you can't go without washing.'

At that moment Ivan Il'ich confessed to himself that if there were a single person in the whole world before whom he was not ashamed and of whom he was not afraid, it was this old woman. Then he washed. Long after, in hard moments of his life, he remembered among other qualms of conscience all the circumstances of this awakening, this earthenware basin and china jug, filled with cold water in which bits of ice were still floating, and the oval cake of soap with raised letters wrapped in a pink paper which must have cost fifteen kopecks and had evidently been destined for the bride, but which had to be given up

<sup>1</sup> Little father.

to Ivan Il'ich, and the old woman with a damask linen towel over her left shoulder. The cold water revived him; he wiped himself, and without saying a word, not even thanking his sister of mercy, he seized his cap, threw the fur coat handed him by Psel-donymov's mother over his shoulders, and hurried out through the passage and kitchen, where the cat was already mewling and the cook raised herself on her bed of straw to look after him with greedy curiosity. He ran through the yard to the street and threw himself into a passing *izvoschik*. The morning was frosty; a frozen yellow fog hung about the houses and bedimmed everything. Ivan Il'ich turned up his collar. He thought that everybody was looking at him, that everybody knew him, that they would all get to know . . .

For eight days he never left his house and never appeared at his office. He was ill, painfully ill, but more morally than physically. In those eight days he passed through a lifetime in hell, and they will no doubt be put to his credit in the next world. There were moments when he thought of becoming a monk—there were indeed, for his fancy began to divert itself very much in this direction. Visions presented themselves to him of the calm, subterranean singing, the open coffin, the life in a solitary cell, wood, or cave, but recovering himself he at once confessed that it was all terrible nonsense and exaggeration, and he was ashamed of it. Then began moral attacks concerning his *existence manquée*. Then shame burst out again in his soul, instantly conquering it and burning it up; it corroded everything. He shuddered as various pictures rose in his mind. What will they say about him, what will they think about him, how will he ever be able to enter his office again, what whispers will pursue him for a whole year—for ten years—for his whole life! This story about him will be handed down to future generations. There were moments when he fell to such a degree of pusillanimity that he was



ready to go at once to Semen Ivanovich, beg his pardon, and ask his friendship. He did not justify himself even, he blamed himself entirely; he could find no excuse for himself and was ashamed at not being able to.

He also thought of resigning his appointment at once and quietly devoting himself in solitude to the happiness of humanity. One thing was certain in any case; he must change all his acquaintances and do it in such a way that all recollection of him be rooted out. Then, again, it occurred to him that this was all nonsense, and that a redoubled severity with his subordinates might put the whole matter right. From that moment he began again to hope and regain courage. At last after eight days of doubt and suffering he felt that he could bear the uncertainty no longer, and one fine morning decided to go to the office.

While he was sitting at home sorrowing, he had pictured to himself a thousand times how he would enter his office. He had the terrifying conviction that he would certainly hear ambiguous whispers, would see ambiguous faces, would have to face malignant smiles. What was his surprise when in reality none of this occurred. He was received respectfully; everyone bowed to him, was serious, was occupied with his work. His heart was filled with happiness by the time he got to his private room.

He began at once to devote himself to business, listened to several reports and explanations, and gave his decisions. He felt that he had never before reasoned so justly or decided so wisely or in such a business-like manner as on that morning. He saw that they were satisfied with him, that they honoured him, that they treated him with respect. The most sensitive susceptibility could not have noticed anything. Everything went off splendidly.

At last Akim Petrovich appeared with a bundle of papers. At his appearance something seemed to prick Ivan Il'ich's heart for a moment, but only for a

moment. He began to attend to Akim Petrovich, spoke with great importance, pointed out to him how matters were to be settled, and explained the way to do it. He only noticed that he avoided looking too long at Akim Petrovich, or it might be better to say that Akim Petrovich was afraid of looking at him. At last Akim Petrovich finished his business and began to collect his papers.

'There is another request,' he began dryly; 'the clerk Pseldonymov begs to be transferred to the department of . . . His Excellency Semen Ivanovich Shipulenko has promised him a post. He begs the gracious co-operation of your Excellency.'

'Oh! so he wishes to be transferred,' said Ivan Il'ich, and he felt that a great load had been removed from his heart. He looked at Akim Petrovich and at that moment their eyes met.

'Why not? I for my part—I will use my . . .'

answered Ivan Il'ich, 'I am ready . . .'

It was apparent that Akim Petrovich was anxious to slip away, but suddenly Ivan Il'ich in a burst of nobility finally decided to speak out. He had evidently again an inspiration.

'Tell him,' he began, looking straight at Akim Petrovich with a look full of deep meaning—'tell Pseldonymov that I have no spite against him, that I don't wish him any harm! On the contrary, that I am ready to forget all the past, to forget everything . . . everything . . .'

Suddenly Ivan Il'ich stopped, struck with surprise at Akim Petrovich's strange behaviour. He, a sensible man, for some unknown reason seemed to have become suddenly a terrible fool. Instead of listening, and listening to the end, he blushed, blushed to the last stage of stupidity, and began hastily, one might almost say with indecency, to bow with short little nods and at the same time to step backwards towards the door. His whole appearance showed that his only wish was to sink through the earth or, more precisely, to get back to his desk. When he was left



alone, Ivan Il'ich rose in confusion from his chair. He looked in the glass but did not see his face.

'No ! severity, just strict severity !' he murmured almost unconsciously to himself, and suddenly a bright red suffused his face. He became ashamed of himself, he felt a heaviness on his soul, in a way he had never experienced during the most unbearable moments of his eight days' illness. 'I have not stood the test,' he said to himself, and sank into his chair quite overcome.

# VSEVOLOD MIKHAYLOVICH GARSHIN

1855-88

## THE SIGNAL

SEMEN IVANOV was a watchman on a railway line. From his watch-house to the nearest stations it was twelve versts on one side and ten versts on the other. About four versts away a large mill had been started the year before, and its high, dark chimney could be seen beyond the wood; nearer than this, with the exception of watch-houses like the one he lived in, there was no habitation.

Semen Ivanov was a sick and broken man. Nine years before he had served as orderly to an officer and had been through a whole campaign with him. He had been hungry and cold, he had been baked in the sun, he had marched forty or fifty versts in heat and frost, he had been under fire, but, thank God, not a bullet had grazed him. The regiment had been in the front line for a whole week, during which constant fire had been kept up between them and the Turks, who were on the other side of a little hollow; from morning till night the firing never ceased. Semen's officer was also in the front line. Three times a day Semen carried him his rations and a hot samovar from the regimental kitchen in a ravine. He had to cross an open space with the samovar, and the bullets whizzed around him and rattled on the stones. Semen was afraid and wept, but still went on. The officers were very pleased with him—they always



had hot tea. He returned from the campaign uninjured, but he had pains in his arms and legs. Since that time he had suffered many misfortunes. He went home—his old father died, his four-year-old son died also, of a bad throat. Semen and his wife alone remained. The work on the land did not prosper—how could it?—with swollen hands and feet it is difficult to plough. At last they could no longer bear it in their village, and went to new places in search of happiness. Semen and his wife had looked for work on the railway, in Kharkov and on the Don. They had no luck anywhere. Then his wife went into service and Semen continued to wander about. Once he had to travel by train; at one small station he looked out, and seemed to know the stationmaster. Semen looked at him, the stationmaster looked at Semen. They recognized each other; Semen had known the other as an officer in his regiment.

‘You’re Ivanov?’ he asked.

‘Just so, your honour, that’s me.’

‘How did you get here?’

Semen told him all about it.

‘Where are you going now?’

‘I don’t know, your honour.’

‘What do you mean, you fool, you don’t know?’

‘Just so, your honour, because I have nowhere to offer myself. I must go on looking for some sort of work, your honour.’

The stationmaster looked at him, considered, and then said, ‘Look here, my friend; stay at the station for the time being. You are married, I think? Where’s your wife?’

‘Just so, your honour, I’m married. My wife is in Kursk, in service with a merchant.’

‘Well, then, write to your wife and tell her to come here. I will get her a free pass. One of our watchmen’s houses will soon be vacant. I will speak to the chief of this section about you.’

‘I am much obliged, your honour,’ said Semen.

So he remained at the station. He helped in the

stationmaster's kitchen, chopped wood, swept the yard and the platform. In a fortnight his wife arrived, and Semen took their things to his watch-house on a hand-cart. The watch-house was new and warm; he could have as much wood as he liked, a small kitchen-garden was left by the last occupant, and there was nearly half an acre of arable land beside the line. Semen was delighted; he began to think how he would cultivate the land, and buy a cow and a horse.

He was given all that was necessary for his work: a green flag and a red flag, a lantern, a horn, a hammer, a wrench to tighten the nuts, a crowbar, a spade, a broom, bolts, and clasp hooks; he was also given two books—the rules and the time-table. At first Semen could not sleep at night—he was always studying the time-table; if a train were due in two hours he would go over his beat, and then sit down on the bench near his house and look and listen if the rails vibrated—if the sound of the train could not be heard. He learned the rules by heart, and though he could only read by spelling out each word, he managed to learn them all.

It was summer and the work was easy; there was no snow to clear away. There were but few trains on that line, so Semen passed along the verst in his charge twice a day, tightened a nut here and there, arranged the ballast, looked to the drain-pipes, and then returned to his house to occupy himself with the cultivation of his land. But in his home work there was one hindrance: whenever he wanted to do anything he had to ask permission of the road-master, who had to make a report to the chief of the section, and before his request was granted the time for doing the work was past. Semen and his wife began to feel dull.

About two months went by; Semen began to make friends with the neighbouring watchmen. One was a very old man; there was a perpetual rumour of his being replaced, for he could scarcely get out of his house; his wife used to look after the line for



him. The other watchman, who was nearer to the station, was a thin and muscular young fellow. Semen first met him on the railway line just at the point where their two beats met. Semen took off his cap and bowed.

'Good health to you, neighbour,' he said.

His neighbour looked at him sideways.

'How do you do?' he answered, and turning round went away. Some time after their wives met. Semen's Arina greeted the neighbour's wife; she also said only a few words and went away. Semen met her once and said, 'How is it, young woman, that your husband is not talkative?' The young woman was at first silent, and then said: 'And what is he to talk about to you? Each one has his own affairs. . . . Go your way in God's name.'

However, before a month had passed they had made friends. When Semen and Vasili met on the railway line, they would sit down on the bank, light their short pipes, and tell each other how they lived. Vasili was more often silent, but Semen would tell of his native village and about the campaign.

'It's not a little trouble I've had in my life,' he said, 'and God knows it hasn't been a long one. God has not given me luck. Whatever luck the Lord dispenses, so must it be. That's how it is, brother, Vasili Stepanych.'

Vasili Stepanych knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the rails and got up.

'It's not the luck God gives us that's against us, but men,' he said. 'There are no beasts of prey worse than men. Wolves don't eat wolves, but men will eat other men alive.'

'Nay, brother, wolves do eat wolves, you can't deny!'

'The word came to my mind and I said it. All the same, there are no creatures more cruel. If it wasn't for man's wickedness and greediness one could live. Everyone waits for a chance to catch you alive, to snatch your last bite and devour it.'

Semen reflected.

'I don't know, brother,' he said. 'Perhaps it is so, but if it is, then God ordained it.'

'If that's so,' Vasili answered, 'then we have nothing more to say to one another. If we cast every injustice on God and only sit and suffer, we are not men but cattle. That's what I say!'

He turned round and went away without saying good-bye. Semen also got up.

'Neighbour, why do you swear at me?' he cried after him.

His neighbour did not turn round. Semen stood and looked after him until he was no longer seen in the hollow at the turning. Then he returned home and said to his wife: 'Well, Arina, we've got a nice neighbour: he's not a man, he's a spiteful brute!'

However, they did not quarrel; they soon met again, and sat down and talked as before, always on the same subject.

'Well, my friend, if it were not for those people, you and I would not be sitting in these watch-houses,' said Vasili.

'What's the matter with the watch-houses? They're not so bad; you can live in them.'

'You can live in them, you can live in them! That's what you say! You have lived long but gained little, looked long and seen little! What sort of life has a poor man in a watch-house, or anywhere else? They'll eat you alive, the blood-suckers! They'll squeeze the last drop of blood out of you, and when you get old throw you away, like offal only fit for swine! What wages do you get?'

'Little enough, Vasili Stepanovich; twelve roubles.'

'And I get thirteen and a half. Now tell me why. By the rules of the company we ought all to get the same wage: fifteen roubles a month, and light and fuel. Who has ordered that we, you and I, should receive twelve roubles or thirteen and a half? First let me ask you that? And then you say one can live! You understand it's not a question of a rouble



and a half, or even of three roubles—even if they paid us the whole fifteen! I was at the station last month when the director passed, and I saw him. He had all sorts of honours. There he was travelling in a special car: he got out and stood on the platform. . . . Well, I shan't stay here long; I'll follow my nose where it leads me!

'Where will you go, Stepanych? Let well alone! Here you have a house, you are warm, you have a bit of land, and a wife who can work.'

'A bit of land! You just look at my bit of land. There's not as much as a twig on it. Last spring I planted some cabbages. The roadmaster comes along: "What's the meaning of this?" says he. "Did you make an application? Did you get permission? Out with them this minute. Not a trace of them must remain!" He was drunk. Another time he would have said nothing, but his head was fuddled.

. . . "Three roubles fine!"'

Vasili smoked his pipe in silence and then said: 'A little more, and I would have thrashed him to death.'

'Well, well, neighbour, you're hot-headed, let me tell you!'

'I'm not hot-headed, I only think and speak the truth. He'll catch it from me yet. I'll complain to the chief of the section.'

He did complain.

The chief of the section came to inspect the line. Three days later some important personages from Petersburg were expected to pass; an inspection of the line was made, as everything had to be put in order before they arrived. Ballast was added where necessary, and levelled up, the sleepers were examined, the ties tested with hammers, nuts screwed tighter, posts painted, and at the level crossings yellow sand strewn. The old watchwoman turned her old husband out to pull up the weeds. Semen worked hard for a whole week and got everything in order. He mended his *kaftan* and cleaned it, and as for his metal disk, he

scrubbed it with brickdust till it shone brilliantly. Vasili worked hard too. The chief of the section arrived in a hand-car; four labourers were working the handles, the cog-wheels buzzed, the machine went at the rate of twenty versts an hour till the wheels groaned. It dashed up to Semen's watch-house. Semen ran out and made his report like a soldier. Everything was in order.

'How long have you been here?' asked the chief.

'Since the second of May, your honour.'

'All right. Thank you. Who is at number one hundred and sixty-four?'

The roadmaster, who was with him on the hand-car, answered: 'Vasili Spiridonov.'

'Spiridonov, Spiridonov . . . ? Ah! Is it the same fellow who was reprimanded last year?'

'Yes, it's the same man.'

'Ah well, we shall see. Get on.'

The labourers began to work the handles and the hand-car started.

Semen looked after it and thought, 'They'll have some fine fun with my neighbour!'

About two hours later he went his rounds. From the hollow he saw somebody walking along the line who seemed to have something white on his head. Semen looked more attentively—it was Vasili; he had a stick in his hand and a little bundle over his shoulder, and his cheek was tied up with a handkerchief.

'Where are you off to, neighbour?' Semen cried out to him.

Vasili came quite close; his face was distorted and as white as chalk and his eyes were wild; he tried to speak but his voice broke.

'I'm going to town, to Moscow, to the Board.'

'To the Board . . . so, so! To complain, I suppose? Drop it, Vasili Stepanych, forget it!'

'No, brother, I shan't forget it. It's too late to forget. Just look, he struck me in the face—made it bleed. As long as I live I will never forget it, I will not leave it so!'



Semen took his arm.

'Leave it alone, Stepanych; it's the truth I tell you: you'll not mend matters!'

'Mend matters? I know very well I can't mend matters! It's true what you say about God's luck. I shan't make it better for myself, but one must stick up for the truth, old fellow.'

'Just tell me how it happened.'

'How it happened! He examined everything, got off the hand-car, and went into the house. I knew he would examine everything carefully, and I had put all in order, as it should be. He was just about to go when I made my complaint. He began to scream at me: "This", he said, "is a government inspection, and you come with your complaints about a kitchen garden! This," he said, "is a matter for Privy Councillors, and you come worrying with your cabbages!" I could not resist saying a word—not very much, but it seemed to offend him, and he gave me one in the face;—and I stood there just as if it ought to be like that! They drove away and I came to myself, washed my face, and started.'

'How about the watch-house?'

'My wife is there. She'll see to it all right; the devil take them and their railway!'

Vasili got up and prepared to start.

'Good-bye, Ivanich. I don't know whether I shall get justice done me.'

'You don't mean to go on foot?'

'I shall ask at the station to go on a goods train. I shall be in Moscow to-morrow.'

The neighbours took leave of each other and Vasili started. For a long time he was not seen again. His wife did his work and did not sleep night or day. She wore herself out waiting for her husband. On the third day the inspector's train passed; there was an engine, a luggage van, and two first-class cars. Vasili was still not there. On the fourth day Semen met his wife, her face swollen with crying and her eyes red.

'Has your husband returned?' he asked.

The woman only waved her hand, said nothing, and went her own way.

Semen had learned as a boy how to make flutes of willow branches. He would press the heart out of the stick, bore holes where necessary and make a mouth-piece at the end, and do it all so well that you could play anything on it. He made a great many of these pipes in his spare time, sent them to town with the guard of a goods-train whom he knew, and got two copecks apiece for them at market. On the third day after the inspectors had passed by, he left his wife to meet the six o'clock evening train, and taking a knife went into the wood to cut sticks for his flutes. He got to the end of his beat, at the point where the line took a sharp turn, descended the embankment, and went into the wood. About half a verst farther on there was a large bog, and near it were to be found the best willow sticks for making flutes. He cut a whole bundle of them and turned to go home. He went through the wood; the sun was already low. There was dead silence; you could only hear the birds chirp and the rustle of the dry leaves underfoot. Semen went a little farther, nearly to the railway line; he seemed to hear a sound like the ringing of metal on metal. Semen walked faster. There were no repairs being made on that part of the line. 'What can this mean?' he thought. He left the outskirts of the forest, and saw before him the railway embankment. On the railway line a man was squatting, engaged in something. Semen approached him quietly; he thought some one had come to steal the screw-nuts. Semen looked. The man rose; he had a crowbar in his hands, which he stuck under one rail, moving it a little to one side. It became dark in Semen's eyes; he wanted to shout but could not. He saw it was Vasili, and ran towards him as fast as he could, but Vasili, with his crowbar and wrench, rushed down the other side of the embankment.

'Vasili Stepanych! Old fellow! brother! come



back! Give me the crowbar! Let's put the rail in place, nobody will know. Come back, save your soul from sin!'

Vasili did not come back, but went into the wood.

Semen stood before the detached rail, he had let his sticks fall. The train that was coming was not a goods but a passenger train. He had no means of stopping it, no flags. He could not replace the rail with his bare hands nor drive in the ties. He must run somewhere, he must certainly run to his house for implements. Lord, help us!

Semen ran towards his house gasping. He ran and thought every moment he would fall. He ran out of the wood; it was only a couple of hundred yards to his house. The siren sounded at the mill—it was six o'clock. At two minutes past six the train was due. Good Lord, save the innocent souls! Semen saw it all: the engine would catch its left wheels in the detached rail, tremble, heel over, tear up the rails, shiver the sleepers! Just there was the curve in the line; the embankment goes sheer down twenty-five yards, and there in the train—in the third-class car—women and little children crowded together. . . . There they all sit expecting nothing! Lord, teach me what to do!—No, there's not time to run to the house and run back, however fast you hurry . . . !

Semen did not run to the house, but went back, running faster than before. He ran almost unconsciously, not knowing what would happen next. He ran to the detached rail: there his sticks were lying in a heap. He stooped down, picked up a stick—he did not know why—and ran farther. He fancied he heard the train coming. He heard a distant whistle—the rails began to vibrate gently. He had no strength to run any farther; he stopped about two hundred yards from the place of danger. At that moment light seemed to come to his brain. He took off his cap, took out of it a cotton handkerchief, pulled his knife out of his high-boot, and crossed himself—'God bless me!'

He stuck the knife into his left arm above the elbow;

the blood spurted out, flowing in a hot stream. He wetted his handkerchief with it, smoothed it, spread it out, tied it to his stick, and held it up—his red flag.

He stood there waving his flag; already he could see the train. The engine-driver did not see him; the train would come near, and in a couple of hundred yards one cannot stop a heavy train!

His blood flowed out more and more; Semen pressed the wound to his side, wishing to quench it, but the blood would not stop—the wound in the arm was deep. He felt giddy; black flies danced before his eyes . . . then it got quite dark . . . there was the sound of bells in his ears. He could not see the train nor hear its noise—he had but one thought in his mind: ‘I shall not be able to stand—I shall fall—I shall drop the flag—the train will go over me—help me, Good Lord, send relief . . .!’

His eyes grew dim, his mind became a blank, and he dropped the flag. But the bloody standard did not fall to the ground, somebody’s hand caught it and held it high towards the approaching train. The engine-driver saw it, closed the valve, reversed the engine, and stopped the train.

The people jumped out of the cars, crowding together. They saw a man lying unconscious covered with blood; another man stood near him with a bloody rag tied to a stick.

Vasili looked around him and bowed his head.

‘Bind me,’ he said; ‘I unscrewed the rail.’

## THE RED FLOWER

(TO THE MEMORY OF I. S. TURGENEV)

### I

‘In the name of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Peter the First, I order an inspection of this mad-house!’



These words were uttered in a loud, sharp, resonant voice. The clerk of the hospital, who was registering the new patient in a large, ragged book on an ink-stained table, could not restrain a smile. But the two young men who had accompanied the patient did not smile. They could scarcely stand on their legs after two days and two nights passed, without sleep, alone with the madman whom they had just brought by train to the hospital. At the last station but one the fit of madness had become worse; they had managed to obtain a strait-jacket, and with the aid of the guard and a gendarme, had put it on the patient. In this way they had been able to bring him to the town and the hospital.

He looked terrible. Over his grey suit, which he had torn into tatters in his fits of madness, was a coarse sail-cloth jacket, with a wide opening at the neck, fitting close to his figure; the long sleeves pressed his arms crosswise to his breast and were tied at the back. His bloodshot eyes stared wildly (he had not slept for more than forty-eight hours) and shone with a restless, fiery brightness; a nervous movement twitched his lower lip; his matted curly hair fell on his forehead like a mane; with rapid heavy steps he paced from one corner of the office to the other, examining with curiosity the old cupboards full of papers and the oilcloth-covered chairs, and now and then glancing at his travelling companions.

‘Take him into the ward on the right.’

‘I know, I know! I was here with you before, a year ago. We went over the hospital. I know all about it, and it will be difficult to deceive me,’ said the patient.

He turned to the door, which the warder opened for him. With the same rapid, heavy, and resolute step, lifting his insane head high, he went out of the office and almost running turned to the right into the insanity ward. Those who accompanied him could hardly keep pace with him.

'Ring! I cannot—you have tied my arms.'

The hall-porter opened the door and the travellers entered the hospital.

The house was an old brick building constructed like all old-fashioned government offices. Two large rooms, one the dining-room and the other the common living-room for the quieter patients, a broad passage with a glass door at the end that looked out on a flower garden, and about twenty bedrooms, occupied the ground-floor. There were two other rooms: one with padded walls and the other only boarded, in which the violent patients could be confined, and likewise a huge, vaulted, half-dark room which served as a bathroom. The upper story was occupied by the women. From it came a confused noise broken by howls and lamentations. The hospital had been built for eighty patients, but as it was the only one in that part of the country and was used by several neighbouring provinces, there were often as many as three hundred patients confined in it. In each of the small rooms there were from four to five beds. In winter when the patients were not allowed to go into the garden, and the iron-barred windows were kept closed, the air became unbearably suffocating.

The new patient was taken into the bathroom. The impression which this room produced even on a healthy person was depressing, and it acted even worse on a deranged and excited imagination. It was a vast, vaulted room with a slippery stone floor, lighted but dimly by a single window in the far corner. The walls and vaults were painted dark red. Two stone baths, which looked like two oval holes filled with water, were on a level with the black and dirty floor. The large copper stove with a cylindrical boiler, that served to heat the water, and a whole system of copper pipes and taps, occupied the corner opposite the window. All this had a strangely fantastic and gloomy effect on a disordered mind, and the man who had charge of the bathroom, a



stout, silent Little Russian, only added to this impression by his sombre visage.

When the patient was brought into this room to be given a bath and, according to the invariable system of the chief doctor, to have a blister applied to the nape of his neck, he became terrified and grew violent. Absurd thoughts, each more monstrous than the other, crowded into his brain. What was this? The Inquisition? The place of secret execution, where his enemies had decided to do away with him? Perhaps even Hell? At last the idea entered his mind that it was a place of torture. He was undressed, despite all his resistance. His malady doubling his strength he was easily able to tear himself out of the grasp of several keepers, so that they fell on the floor. At last four of them threw him down, and each taking him by a leg or an arm plunged him in the warm water. It appeared to him to be boiling, and all sorts of disconnected, broken thoughts of tortures by boiling water and red-hot irons passed through his disordered brain. Choking with the water he swallowed, and convulsively jerking his legs and arms by which the keepers held him tightly, he gasped for breath and shouted such incoherent speeches that it would be impossible even to imagine what they were like without actually hearing them. They were a mixture of prayers and curses. He screamed as long as he had any strength left; at last he became quiet, and shedding hot tears, uttered words that had not the slightest reference to what had gone before.

‘—Great martyr Saint George! Into your hands I commit my body—my soul—no—oh no——!’

The keepers still held him although he was now quite quiet. The warm bath and the bag of ice that had been put on his head had done their work. But when they took him almost senseless out of the bath and placed him on a stool to apply the blister, the remains of his strength and his deranged thoughts seemed again to revive.

'Why do you do this? Oh why?' he cried. 'I do not want to harm a soul! Why do you want to kill me? Oh, oh, oh! Oh, good Lord! Oh, you who have been martyred before me! I beseech you, save me . . . !'

The burning of the blister on his neck made him struggle desperately. The attendants could not master him and did not know what to do. 'There's nothing for it,' said the soldier who had applied the blister, 'we must wipe it off.'

These simple words made the patient shiver. Wipe what? wipe what off? wipe whom off? wipe me off? thought he, and in mortal terror he closed his eyes. The soldier took a coarse linen cloth in both hands and pressing heavily passed it rapidly over the patient's neck, tearing away the blister and with it the upper skin, leaving a bare, raw wound. The pain of this operation, which would have been unbearable to a calm and healthy man, seemed to the patient like the end of all things. He tore himself desperately out of the hands of the attendants, and his naked body fell on the stone floor. He thought they had chopped off his head. He wanted to cry out but was not able to. He was carried unconscious to his bed and passed after a time into a long and profound sleep.

## II

He awoke in the night. All was quiet. He could hear the regular breathing of the sleepers in the larger room next door. From somewhere in the distance came the strange, monotonous voice of a patient confined for the night in the padded room, who was talking to himself, and above, in the woman's ward, a hoarse contralto was singing a wild song. He felt an awful weakness, as if all his bones were broken; his neck ached horribly.

'Where am I? What has happened to me?



passed through his mind. Then with wonderful clearness he remembered the last month of his life, and he understood that he was ill, he understood his malady. He remembered a number of absurd thoughts, words, and actions, and these recollections made his whole body tremble. 'That is all over, thank God that is all over!' he murmured, and fell asleep again.

An open window with an iron grating looked into a sort of blind alley between high houses and stone walls. Nobody ever went into this part of the grounds, and it was thickly overgrown with all sorts of wild bushes and lilacs, which were in full bloom at this season of the year. Beyond these bushes, just opposite the window, was a high wall over which the tops of the trees in the large garden could be seen brilliantly illuminated by the moon. To the right rose the white walls of the hospital with its iron-grated windows lit up from within. To the left the walls of the mortuary also shone white in the bright moonbeams. The rays of the moon fell through the grated window on the floor and shone on part of the patient's bed, his pale, worn face, and closed eyes. He exhibited no signs of madness now.

He was sleeping the deep, heavy sleep of an exhausted man, without dreams, without the slightest motion, almost without breathing. For a few moments he awoke in his full senses, as if quite well—only to arise the next morning as mad as ever.

### III

'How do you feel this morning?' asked the doctor the following day.

The patient, who was only just awake, was still lying under his bed-clothes

'Very well,' he answered; he jumped up, put on his slippers, and seized his dressing-gown. 'Splendid!

There's only one thing: here!' And he pointed to the back of his neck. 'I can't turn my head without pain. But that's nothing. All is well if only one understands, and I do understand.'

'Do you know where you are?'

'Certainly, doctor! I am in a madhouse. If only you understand, it is all quite the same. It does not matter at all!'

The doctor looked earnestly in his eyes. His handsome, delicate face, with its well-brushed, golden beard and quiet, blue eyes that looked through gold-rimmed spectacles, was immovable and unfathomable. He was observing.

'Why are you looking so attentively at me? You will never read what I have on my soul,' continued the patient, 'but I see quite clearly what is written on yours. Why do you commit evil? Why do you collect such numbers of unhappy people and keep them here? For me it is all the same—I understand it all and am calm; but for them? Why this suffering? When a man has reached the point of having a great thought in his soul—the common thought—it is all the same to him where he lives—what he feels. Even to live—or not to live . . . is it not so?'

'Perhaps,' answered the doctor; he sat down on a chair in the corner of the room, so as to be able to watch the patient, who was now pacing the room with rapid steps from corner to corner, shuffling along in his large horse-leather slippers and flapping his dressing-gown of cotton material with broad red stripes and large flowers. The orderly and inspector who had accompanied the doctor stood at attention near the door.

'And I have got it!' cried the patient. 'When I found it, I felt as if I were born again. My feelings grew more acute, my brain worked as it had never done before. What was formerly attained only by a long process of speculation and conjecture I now know by intuition. I have, in fact, reached the point



that has been worked out by philosophy. I am experiencing in myself the great idea that space and time are fictions—I am living in all centuries—I am living without space—everywhere or nowhere, just as you like. I am therefore quite indifferent whether you keep me here or let me go away—whether I am free or bound. I have noticed that there are here some others like me, but for the rest of the crowd it is awful. Why do you not set them at liberty? Who requires——

‘You said,’ interrupted the doctor, ‘that you live outside space and time. On the other hand it is impossible not to agree that we, you and I, are in this room, and that it is now’—the doctor pulled his watch out of his pocket—‘half-past ten on the sixth day of May of the year 18—. What do you think about that?’

‘Nothing. It’s all the same to me where I am or when I live. If it is all the same to me, does it not mean that I am everywhere and always?’

The doctor smiled.

‘Strange logic,’ he said, getting up; ‘perhaps you are right. Good morning. Would you like a cigar?’

‘Thank you’; he stopped in his walk, took a cigar, and with a nervous movement bit off the end. ‘This helps me to think,’ he said; ‘this is the universe—microcosm. At one end alkalis, at the other acids: that is the equilibrium of the universe by which the elements are neutralized.—Good-bye, doctor!’

The doctor proceeded on his rounds. Most of the patients were awaiting him, standing drawn up near their beds. No authorities are treated with such respect as the doctors in charge of a madhouse are treated by their patients.

The patient, when he was left alone, continued to pace the room in fits and starts from corner to corner. They brought him some tea. Without sitting down he swallowed in two gulps the contents of a large mug and in an instant devoured a large

piece of white bread. Then he went out of the room and for several hours walked without once stopping from end to end of the building with his rapid, heavy gait. It was a rainy day and the patients were not allowed to go into the garden. When the orderly looked for the new patient he was directed to the end of the passage, where he found him with his face pressed to the glass door earnestly looking out at the flower-garden. His attention was attracted by an unusually bright red flower belonging to the poppy family.

'Please come and be weighed!' said the orderly, touching his shoulder. When the patient turned to him he almost reeled back with alarm; there was such a wild look of wickedness and hate shining from those senseless eyes. When he saw it was the orderly, he at once altered the expression of his face and obediently followed him without saying a word, as if plunged in deep thought. They went into the doctor's receiving room; the patient got on the small, decimal weighing-machine without help; the orderly weighed him and registered '109 pounds' opposite his name in a book. The next day his weight was 107, the third day 106.

'If it goes on like this he will not live long,' said the doctor, and ordered the patient to be fed as well as possible.

Notwithstanding all their efforts and the unusual appetite of the patient, he got thinner every day, and every day the orderly entered in the book a smaller and smaller number of pounds. The patient scarcely slept at all and passed his days in uninterrupted movement.

#### IV

He was conscious that he was in a madhouse, he was even conscious that he was ill. Sometimes, as on the first night, he awoke in the stillness, after a whole day of violent movement, feeling pains in



all his limbs and a terrible heaviness in his head, but in a complete state of consciousness. Perhaps it was owing to the absence of all outer impressions in the stillness and the semi-darkness of the night, or perhaps it was the weak working of the brain of a man only just awake, that caused him at such moments fully to understand his position, and he seemed for the time to be quite well; but with the return of day, with the return of light and the awaking of life in the hospital, he was seized by waves of impressions which his diseased brain could not control, and once more he was a madman. His condition was a strange mixture of correct judgement and utter absurdity. He knew that he was surrounded by mental invalids, but at the same time he thought that each one was some person he had formerly known, or read of in books, or heard about, who was trying secretly to conceal himself or was being concealed. The hospital was inhabited by men of all countries and all times. Here he found both the living and the dead. Here were all the celebrated and powerful men of the earth, and also the soldiers who had fallen in the last war and risen again. He imagined himself in some magic, enchanted circle, having collected in himself all the strength of the world, and in a haughty exaltation he considered himself the centre of this circle. They, his companions in the hospital, had all assembled here with the intention of performing a great work, which dimly appeared to him as a gigantic undertaking for the destruction of evil on the earth. He did not know how it would have to be done but he felt that he possessed sufficient strength to accomplish it. He could read the thoughts of other men, saw in each thing its whole history. The great elms of the hospital garden told him old legends of the past; the buildings, that had really been built a fairly long time, he imagined to have been constructed by Peter the Great, and he imagined that the Tsar had resided there at the time of the battle of Poltava. He could



read it on the walls and on the crumbling plaster, on pieces of brick or tile which he found in the garden : the whole history of the house and garden were written on them. He peopled the small building that served as a mortuary with tens and hundreds of people who had long been dead, and he gazed fixedly at a little window that opened from its basement into a corner of the garden, seeing in the uneven and rainbow-coloured reflections of the old and dirty glass familiar faces he had once met in life, or whose portraits he had seen.

Fine bright weather set in and the patients spent the whole day in the open air in the garden. The not very large part of the garden allotted to them was thickly planted with trees, and where it was possible there were beds of flowers. The overseer made all who were capable of doing any work occupy themselves in the garden. All day long they swept the paths or strewed sand on them, weeded and watered the beds of flowers, cucumbers, melons, and water-melons that had been dug up and planted by their hands. One corner of the garden was overgrown by cherry-trees and bordered by an avenue of elms ; in the middle of it, on an artificial mound, were the most beautiful flower-beds of the whole garden : bright flowers formed the borders of the highest parts of this mound and in the centre was a large and rare red and yellow dahlia. This dahlia formed the centre of the whole garden and also marked its highest point, and it was observed that many of the patients attributed to it some mysterious power. To the new patient, too, it seemed to be something uncommon, a sort of Chief of the garden and the buildings. Along all the paths were flower-beds also planted with flowers by the patients. Here grew every sort of flower that can be found in the gardens of Little Russia—standard roses, brilliant petunias, tall tobacco-plants with small pink blossoms, mint, marigolds, nasturtiums and poppies. Here too, not far from the porch, grew three plants of a particular



species of poppy, much smaller than the usual poppy and differing from it by the unusual brightness of its brilliant blood-red colour. It was this flower that had so impressed the patient when, on his first morning in the hospital, he had looked through the glass door into the garden.

The first time he went into the garden he stopped to look at these bright red flowers before he went down the steps. There were only two flowers out, and they grew as if by chance on a spot that had not been weeded and were surrounded by orach and some sort of steppe grass.

The patients passed out of the door one by one and each received from the warder who stood there a thick knitted white cap with a red cross on the forehead. These caps had been used during the war and bought at an auction by the hospital. But the patient naturally attached a special and mysterious significance to this red cross. He took his cap off, and looked at the cross and then at the poppies. The flowers were brighter.

'They conquer,' said the patient—'but we shall see.'

He went down the steps that led from the porch, looked round, and not noticing the warder who was standing behind him stepped over a flower-bed and stretched his hand towards the flower, but could not make up his mind to pluck it. He had a sensation of heat and a feeling of pricking, first in his outstretched hand and then in his whole body, as if some strong current of an unknown power were emitted from the red petals, and were penetrating into his whole system. He got nearer and stretched his hand quite close to the flower, but it seemed to him to defend itself by breathing out a deadly poisonous breath. He became giddy; he made a last desperate effort and had already seized hold of the stem when suddenly a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. It was the warder who had caught hold of him.

'You must not pluck the flowers,' said the old Little Russian, 'and you mustn't walk on the flower-beds. There are many of you madmen here; if each of you takes only one flower, the whole garden will be stripped,' he said in a persuasive tone, still holding his shoulder.

The patient looked at him, silently released himself from his grasp, and in great agitation went along the path. 'Oh, unfortunate men!' he thought. 'You do not see, you are blinded to such an extent that you even defend it. But whatever it may cost me I will destroy it. If not to-day, then to-morrow we will measure our strength. And if I perish—will it not be all the same?'

He walked about the garden until late in the evening, making acquaintance with other patients and entering into strange conversations with them, in which each only heard answers to his own insane thoughts expressed in mysterious and absurd words. The patient walked about first with one companion and then with another, and by the end of the day he was still more convinced that 'all was ready,' as he said to himself. 'Soon, soon these iron bars will fall in ruins and these prisoners will be let out and hurry away to all the corners of the earth, and the whole world will shake, and throw off its worn-out coating, and appear in a new and splendid beauty.' He had almost forgotten the flowers; but when he left the garden and was going up the steps, he again perceived them in the darkening, dewy grass, looking like two burning red coals. Then the patient lagged behind, and getting where the warder could not see him, waited for a favourable moment. Nobody saw him jump over the flower-bed, pluck one of the flowers, and hastily put it in his bosom under his shirt. When the cool, dew-covered petals touched his body, he got as pale as death and his eyes opened wide with terror. A cold sweat came out in beads on his forehead.

Lamps were lighted in the hospital. While waiting



for their supper most of the patients lay down on their beds; only a few restless ones hurriedly walked about the rooms and passages. The patient with the flower in his breast was among them. He walked about, his arms convulsively crossed over his breast; it seemed as if he wanted to crush, to shatter the plant he carried there. When he met anyone he got as far as he could out of their way, seeming to fear even to touch them with his clothes. 'Don't come near me, don't come near me!' he cried. In the hospital little attention was paid to such exclamations. He continued to walk faster and faster, taking larger and larger steps; he walked about hour after hour with a sort of exasperation.

'I will tire you out. I will suffocate you!' he said fiercely and hoarsely. Sometimes he ground his teeth.

Supper was served in the dining-room. Several large gilded and painted wooden bowls containing a sort of thin millet gruel were placed on each of the long tables, which were without table-cloths; the patients sat round the tables on benches and each received a hunch of rye bread. About eight men ate with wooden spoons out of the same bowl. A few who were ordered better food were served separately. Our patient quickly swallowed his portion, which had been brought by the attendant to his room, and not being satisfied with what he had received went into the general dining-room.

'May I sit down here?' he asked the inspector.

'Have you not had your supper?' inquired the inspector as he poured further portions of gruel into the bowls.

'I am very hungry, and I must get as much strength as I can. Food is my only support; you know that I do not sleep at all.'

'Eat, my good fellow, and may it do you good! Tarass, give him a spoon and some bread.'

He sat down before one of the bowls and ate an enormous portion of gruel.

'Now that's enough, that's enough!' said the inspector at last, when all the others had finished and our patient still continued to sit at the bowl scooping up the gruel with one hand and firmly holding his breast with the other. 'You will over-eat yourself.'

'Ah, if you only knew how much strength I require, how much strength! Good-bye, Nikolai Nikolaevich,' said the patient, getting up from table and pressing the inspector's hand with all his strength. 'Good-bye!'

'Where are you going?' asked the inspector, smiling.

'I? Nowhere. I am remaining here. But perhaps to-morrow we shall not see one another. Thank you for all your kindness,' and he once more pressed the inspector's hand. His voice shook and there were tears in his eyes.

'Calm yourself, my dear fellow, calm yourself,' answered the inspector. 'Why do you have such dark thoughts? Go to bed and get to sleep quickly. You require more sleep; when once you sleep properly you will soon get better.'

The patient began to sob. The inspector turned away to order the attendants to be quicker clearing away the supper things. In half an hour all were asleep in the hospital with the exception of one man, who lay in his clothes on his bed in the corner room. He was shaking as if with ague, and convulsively he held his hands to his breast, which he imagined was impregnated with some unknown deadly poison.



He did not sleep all night. He had plucked that flower because he felt that it was a deed he had been destined to do. When he had first looked out of the glass door the brilliant red petals had attracted his attention, and it appeared to him that at that



moment he fully understood what he was bound to perform on this earth. In this blood-red flower was concentrated all the evil of the world. He knew that opium was made of poppy-seed. Perhaps this thought had grown and attained gigantic dimensions in his mind, developing into a horrible and grotesque phantom. The flower in his eyes concentrated in itself all evils, it drew into its petals all the innocent blood that had ever been shed, and it was this caused their deep red colour, it absorbed all the tears and all the gall and bitterness of humanity. This was a mysterious and terrible being in opposition to God—Satan, who had taken a humble and innocent form. It was necessary to pluck and kill it. But even this was not enough—it was necessary to prevent it in dying from flooding the whole world with its poison. That is why he had hidden it away in his bosom. He hoped that by morning the flower would have lost all its strength. Its evil would be transferred to his breast, to his soul, and there it would be conquered; or perhaps it would conquer, and then he would perish—die, but die like an honourable wrestler, like mankind's chief wrestler, for never yet had anyone dared to fight against all the evil of the world at once.

‘They did not see it. I saw it. Could I allow it to live? Death is better!’

With failing strength he lay in this imaginary, unreal struggle, but was exhausted by it all the same. The next morning the doctor's assistant found him almost dead. After a few hours, however, he revived, jumped out of bed, and began running about the hospital as usual, talking to the patients and to himself louder and more disconnectedly than ever. He was not allowed to go into the garden; the doctor, seeing that his weight decreased every day, that he could not sleep, and that all day long he never ceased his wanderings, ordered that a large dose of morphia should be injected under his skin. He did not resist; fortunately his insane ideas seemed at that moment

to coincide with this operation. He soon fell asleep; his wild movements ceased, and the loud melody, caused by his own irregular footsteps, that had rung all the time in his ears died away too. He became unconscious and ceased to think of anything, even of the second red flower that it was necessary for him to pluck.

Three days later, however, he was able to pluck it, before the very eyes of the warder, who was not in time to prevent him. The warder ran after him. With loud cries of triumph, with sobs and lamentations, the patient ran into the house, rushed into his bedroom, and hastily hid the plant under his shirt.

'How dare you pick the flowers?' demanded the warder who had followed him. The patient, who was already lying on his bed in his accustomed position—with his arms crossed over his breast—began to talk such nonsense that the warder only removed silently from his head the cap with the red cross, which in his hurry he had forgotten to take off, and left him alone. The imaginary struggle began again. The patient felt that currents of evil issued from the flower in long, serpent-like coils, which wound themselves round him, pressed and crushed his limbs, and imbued his whole body with their poisonous effluvia. He wept and, at intervals, when he was not heaping curses on his enemy, prayed to God. The flower was faded by the evening. The patient trod under his feet the blackened plant and then, carefully collecting all the remains from the floor, carried them into the bathroom, where he threw the formless little mass of vegetation into the stove amongst red-hot, burning coals, and watched for a long time how his enemy fizzled and shrivelled up and at last turned into a soft, snow-white heap of ashes. He blew upon it and it disappeared.

The next day the patient was worse. Deadly pale, with hollow cheeks and deeply-sunken, glowing eyes, he now went about with tottering steps, often



stumbling in his insane wanderings, and talked and talked unceasingly.

'I should not like to have to use force,' said the chief doctor to his assistant.

'But it is imperative to stop this exertion. To-day his weight was only 93 pounds. If it goes on like this, he will be dead in two days.'

The chief doctor reflected. 'Morphia? Chloral?' he said, half questioningly.

'Only yesterday, morphia had no effect. Order him to be tied to his bed. I doubt whether he will live long.'

## VI

The patient was bound. He lay in a strait-jacket on his bed firmly tied with broad bands of linen to the bars of his iron bedstead; but his wild movements did not decrease, they rather became greater. For many hours he never stopped trying to free himself from his fetters. At last by a strong effort he succeeded in tearing one of the bands and released his legs, and thus managed to slip out of the other bandages. Then he began to walk about the room with bound hands, shouting out all sorts of wild, unintelligible speeches.

'Oh, what's the matter with you?' cried the warder. 'What devil has helped you? Grisha, Ivan, come here. The patient has got loose.'

Then all three fell upon him and a long struggle began, which was tiring to the keepers, but was torture for the patient, who was defending himself and using up the remainder of his almost exhausted strength. At last they were able to throw him on the bed, where they fastened him even tighter than before.

'You do not understand what you are doing!' cried the patient, quite out of breath. 'You will all perish! I saw a third which was hardly open. Now it will be quite ready. Let me finish this work.'

It must be killed, killed, killed! Then all will be ended, all will be saved. I would send you, but it is only I who can do it. You would die if you even touched it!

'Be quiet, sir, be quiet,' said the old warder, who had been left on duty near the bed.

Suddenly the patient became quiet. He had decided to trick the warder. All day he was kept bound to his bed, and he was left in the same position for the night. After giving the patient his supper the warder spread a rug on the floor and lay down on it. In a minute he was fast asleep, and the patient began his work.

He turned his body in such a way as to be able to touch the iron bar of the bed and feel it with his wrists through the long sleeves of the strait-jacket, and then began quickly and violently rubbing the coarse sailcloth against the bar. After a time the thick material gave way and he was able to release his forefinger. Then the work went more rapidly. With an adroitness and suppleness which would be inconceivable in a sane man, he managed to untie the knot that attached the sleeves at his back, unlaced the strait-jacket, and then sat listening for a long time to the snores of the warder. The old man was sleeping soundly. The patient took off the jacket and released himself from the bed. He was free. He tried the door. It was locked from the inside, and the key was probably in the warder's pocket. He was afraid of waking the old man if he began to search in his pockets, so he decided to leave the room by the window.

It was a calm, warm, dark night; the window was open; the stars shone in the black sky. He looked at the stars, recognised familiar constellations, and was delighted that they, as he thought, understood him and had sympathy with him. With blinking eyes he saw the endless rays that they sent him and his insane determination increased. It was necessary to bend the thick bar of the iron



grating in order to squeeze through the narrow opening into the blind alley which was overgrown with bushes and climb over the high stone wall. There the last struggle would begin, and afterwards—perhaps even death.

He tried to bend the thick iron bar with his naked hands, but the bar did not yield. Then he twisted the strong sleeves of the strait-jacket into a cord, fixed it to a forged iron spike at the end of a bar, and hung with his whole weight upon it. After desperate efforts that almost exhausted his strength the spike bent: a narrow passage was opened. He squeezed himself through it, and grazing his shoulders, elbows, and bare knees, managed to get through the bushes and found himself near the wall. All was quiet, the flickering night-lights shone but dimly through the windows of the large building; nobody could be seen in the rooms. Nobody saw him; the old man who was on duty at his bedside was probably sound asleep. The stars blinked caressingly at him, and their rays penetrated to his very heart.

‘I am coming to you,’ he whispered, looking up to the sky.

All in tatters after his first efforts, with bleeding knees and arms and broken nails, he began to look for a convenient place to climb the wall. He noticed that some bricks were missing where the stone wall joined the mortuary. Feeling for these spaces, and making full use of them, he managed to scale the wall, and catching hold of the branches of the elm-trees that grew on the other side was able with their aid to let himself quietly down to the ground.

He ran to the familiar place near the porch. The flower with its partly-opened petals looked dark, but showed clearly above the dewy grass.

‘The last one!’ whispered the patient, ‘the last one! To-day it is victory or death! It is all the same to me now. Wait,’ he said, looking up to the sky: ‘I will be with you soon.’

He pulled up the plant, tore it to pieces, crushed it,

and holding it firmly in his hands, returned to his room by the way he had come.

The old man was still fast asleep. The patient had hardly reached his bed when he fell unconscious upon it.

In the morning he was found dead. His face looked calm and bright, the emaciated features with their thin lips and deeply sunken eyes wore an expression of proud happiness. When they put him on the stretcher they tried to open his hand and take out the red flower, but his muscles were rigid, and he carried his trophy with him to the grave.

~~Dear friend,~~

~~you are very~~

~~useless to me~~

~~you are very kind~~ B

you (very much) B

you A

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Roll No 170.

I year



# ANTON CHEKHOV

1860-1904

## AN AWKWARD SITUATION

'CABBY, you have a heart besmeared with tar; you have never been in love, old fellow, and therefore you can't understand my psychology. This rain can no more extinguish the fire that is consuming my soul than a fire brigade could extinguish the sun. The devil, how poetically I express myself! But of course you are not a poet, are you, cabby?'

'No, that I'm not!'

'Well now, look here . . .'

Zhirkov began at last to feel about in his pockets for his purse to pay his fare.

'We settled with you, my friend, for one rouble and a quarter. Here's your fare, a rouble and three ten kopeck pieces—here's five kopecks more. Good-bye, and don't forget me! By the by, just take this basket and put it on the steps—carefully, carefully! That basket has in it a ball-dress for the woman I love more than life!'

With a dissatisfied sigh the cabby grudgingly got off his box, and with difficulty keeping his footing in the darkness as he splashed through the slippery mud, carried the basket to the porch, where he put it down on the steps.

'My! what weather!' he grumbled surlily, and with another sigh and a sniff he unwillingly climbed on to the box again. He clicked up his old horse, which began to splash through the mud with uncertain steps.

'I think I have got all that I ought to have,' said Zhirkov, groping about for the bell; 'Nadia asked me to go to her dressmaker's and fetch her dress—that's it; she asked for sweets and cheese—here they are; a bouquet—here! "I greet thee, holy sanctuary,"' he sang. 'But where the devil is the bell?'

Zhirkov was in the happy frame of mind of a man who has recently had a good supper and good drink and knows very well that he need not get up early next day. Besides, he knew that after his drive from town of an hour and a half through mud and rain a warm fire and a young woman awaited him. It is pleasant to get wet and cold when you know that you will soon be warm again.

In spite of the darkness Zhirkov at last managed to find the bell-handle and gave it two pulls. Steps were heard on the other side of the door.

'Is that you, Dmitry Grigorievich?' whispered a woman's voice.

'Yes, it's I, my charming Dunyasha,' answered Zhirkov. 'Open the door quickly, I am getting wet to the skin.'

'Ah, good God!' whispered the maid Dunyasha in an agitated voice as she opened the door, 'don't talk so loud, and don't stamp your feet. The master has arrived from Paris! He returned this evening!'

At the word 'master,' Zhirkov stepped back from the door and was seized for a moment by the faint-hearted, quite boyish fear that is felt even by very brave men when they are suddenly faced with the possibility of meeting the husband.

'What a sell!' he thought, listening to the cautious way Dunyasha closed the door and went along the little passage. 'What now? Does it mean "About turn"? *Merci!* I didn't expect this!'

He suddenly became amused and jolly. His drive to her from town in the middle of the night through wind and pouring rain appeared to him an entertaining adventure, and now, when he suddenly came upon the husband, the adventure seemed to him odder still.



'A most interesting story, by God!' he said aloud. 'What's to become of me now? Drive back to town? Eh?'

The rain fell in torrents and the wind howled in the trees, but neither the rain nor the trees could be seen through the darkness. As if laughing at him, mocking him maliciously, the water rushed down the gutters and rippled in the ditches. The steps on which he stood had no roof over them, so he really began to get wet through.

'It might be on purpose, his turning up in weather like this!' he thought with a laugh; 'the devil take all husbands!'

His romance with Nadezhda Osipovna had begun a month before, but he had not yet met her husband. He only knew that he was a Frenchman called Boiseau and an agent. Judging by the photograph that Zhirkov had seen, he was a very ordinary, middle-class man of about forty, with a moustache and small beard of the type worn by French soldiers. When you looked at this face, you had a strong inclination to tweak him by his moustache or beard *à la Napoleon*, and ask, 'Well, what news, *Monsieur le sergent*?'

Splashing and stumbling through the wet mud, Zhirkov went a few steps from the door and called out: 'Cab—cab—cabby!' There was no answer. 'Not a sound, not so much as a murmur,' grumbled Zhirkov, as he returned to the steps, feeling his way in the darkness. 'I've sent away my cab, and even by day there are none to be found here! Here's a pretty fix! I shall have to stay here till morning, devil take it! and the basket will get wet and the dress will be spoilt. It cost two hundred roubles! A nice position to be in!'

Wondering where he could shelter and get the basket out of the rain, Zhirkov remembered that at one end of this summer resort there was a dancing ground with a band-stand.

'Shall I try and get to the band-stand?' he asked

himself. 'That's an idea! But shall I be able to lug the basket so far? A beastly large thing, damn it! The cheese and bouquet can go to the devil.'

He took up the basket, but as he did so he remembered that before he got to the band-stand the basket would have had time to get wet through and through five times over.

'That adds to my problems!' he laughed. 'What a fix! Now the water is running down my neck. Brrr!! Wet through, cold, drunk, and no cabby anywhere—now I only want her husband to come out with a stick and thrash me till I'm black and blue!—But what's to be done about it? I can't stay here till morning or the dress will be utterly ruined.—I have it—I'll ring again and hand the things to Dunyasha, and then go to the band-stand.'

Zhirkov rang the bell gently. After about a minute steps were heard in the passage, and a light shone through the key-hole.

'Who is 'erre?' asked a hoarse male voice with a foreign accent.

'By Jingo, the husband!' thought Zhirkov. 'I must make up some story. I say,' he called out, 'is this Zluchkin's house?'

'What the devil? therre is no Slushkine 'erre. Go to the devil with your Slushkine!'

For some reason Zhirkov became confused, coughed apologetically, and retired from the steps. Slipping into a puddle he got his galoshes full of water; he spat angrily but at once began to laugh again. With every minute his adventure became more and more entertaining. He thought with particular pleasure how next day he would tell the whole humorous affair to his friends and even to Nadia, how he would mimic the voice of the husband and the sobs of the galoshes as they stuck in the mud. His friends would split their sides with laughter.

'There's only one thing annoying me—the dress will get wet,' he thought. 'If it were not for this



dress, I should have been asleep long ago under the roof of the band-stand.'

He sat down on the basket to protect it, but the water flowed from his wet mackintosh and hat in even greater streams than from the clouds.

'The deuce take it!'

Having stood half an hour in the rain, Zhirkov began to think about his own health.

'I can easily catch a bad cold this way,' he thought. 'A peculiar position. What about ringing again? H'm! Upon my word, I think I will. If the husband opens the door again, I can make up some sort of tale, and give him the dress. I can't stick here till morning. Well, whatever happens, I'll ring and chance it!'

Like a schoolboy showing his fist at the door and sticking out his tongue at the darkness, Zhirkov pulled the bell with energy. There was a moment of silence. Then he rang again.

'Who is 'erre?' asked the angry voice with a strong foreign accent.

'Does Madame Boiseau live here?' Zhirkov inquired respectfully.

'Hein? What the devil do you want?'

'Madame Katish, the dressmaker, sends Madame Boiseau her dress. Pray excuse it's being so late. The fact is, Madame Boiseau asked that her dress should be sent as soon as possible—before morning—the weather is so abominable—h'm—could scarcely get here—I started from town in the evening—but—I could not . . .'

Zhirkov did not finish before the door opened, and in the flickering light of a small lamp Monsieur Boiseau stood before him on the threshold—the same Monsieur Boiseau he had seen in the photograph, with his soldier-like face and his long moustache, only in the photograph he looked a dandy—now he was clad only in a shirt.

'Very sorry to trouble you,' continued Zhirkov. 'Madame Boiseau ordered her dress to be sent as

soon as possible—h'm—I am Madame Katish's brother—and—and the weather is abominable.'

'All right,' said Boiseau surlily, frowning and taking the basket from Zhirkov, 'thank your sister. My wife waited for her dress until one o'clock. Some sort of a *monsieur* promised to bring it.'

'Please also have the kindness to hand to Madame Boiseau this cheese and these flowers, which your wife left at Madame Katish's.'

Boiseau took the cheese and the bouquet, smelled first the one, then the other, and without closing the door, stood waiting. He looked at Zhirkov—Zhirkov looked at him. There was a moment's silence. Zhirkov remembered the friends to whom he would tell his adventures the next day, and wanted to round them off by adding some joke or other, but he could think of no joke, and the Frenchman stood and looked at him, wondering when he would go away.

'Terrible weather!' murmured Zhirkov; 'pitch dark and muddy and wet. I'm soaked to the skin!'

'Yes, *monsieur*, you are very wet!'

'Add to this my cab has driven away. I don't know where to go.—You would be very kind, sir, if you would allow me to stay here in the passage until the rain stops?'

'Ah! *bien, monsieur*. Take off your galoshes and come this way.—It is nothing—all right!'

The Frenchman closed the door, and led Zhirkov into the very familiar little sitting-room. It looked just as usual, except that a bottle of claret stood on the table, and in the middle of the room there was a row of chairs on which a very thin, narrow mattress had been placed.

'Very cold,' said Boiseau, placing the lamp on the table. 'I only arrived from Paris yesterday. Everywhere it is fine—warm, but here, in Russia, cold, and these mosquit—mosquitoes—*les cousins*—sting damnably.'

Boiseau poured out half a glass of wine, made a serious face, and drank it off.



'Have not slept all night,' he said, sitting down on the mattress, 'what with *les cousins* and some beast ringing the whole time and asking for Slushkine.'

The Frenchman was silent, bowed his head and seemed to be waiting for the rain to stop. Zhirkov thought that it would only be polite to speak to him.

'You were in Paris at a very interesting time,' he began; 'Boulanger resigned while you were there.'

Then Zhirkov talked about Grévy, Déroulède, Zola, and was soon convinced that this was the first time the Frenchman had heard these names. In Paris he knew only a few business firms and his aunt, Mme. Blesser—nobody else. The conversation about politics and literature ended in making Boiseau look very cross. He then helped himself to another glass of wine and stretched himself out on his very thin mattress.

'Well, well, the rights of this husband are evidently not very extensive!' thought Zhirkov. 'That's a fiend of a mattress!'

The Frenchman closed his eyes and remained quiet for about a quarter of an hour; then he suddenly jumped up, stared at his guest with his vacant eyes as if he could not understand anything, looked irritated, and had another glass of wine.

'Damned mosquitoes,' he grumbled, and rubbing one hairy leg against the other went into the next room.

Zhirkov heard him wake some one and say: '*Il y a là un monsieur roux qui t'a apporté une robe.*'

He soon returned and once more had recourse to the bottle.

'My wife will come out soon,' he said, yawning. 'I understand—you require money?'

'It doesn't get any better the longer it lasts,' thought Zhirkov. 'Very curious—Nadezhda Osipovna will appear now. Of course I must look as if I don't know her.'

The rustle of skirts was heard, the door opened

a little, and Zhirkov saw a familiar curly head with flushed cheeks and sleepy eyes.

'Who is it has come from Mme. Katish?' asked Nadezhda Osipovna, but as soon as she saw Zhirkov she gave a little scream, and laughing, came into the room.

'Oh, it's you, is it? What does all this farce mean?—and why are you so dirty?'

Zhirkov got very red; his eyes grew serious, and not knowing what to do he glanced helplessly at Boiseau.

'Ah! I understand,' said the lady of the house. 'You were afraid of Jacques. I forgot to warn Dunyasha . . . You are not acquainted? This is my husband and this is Stepan Andreevich. You've brought my dress? Thanks awfully, old boy! Come along, I *am* so sleepy. And Jacques, you go to sleep too,' she said, turning to her husband; 'you must be tired after your long journey.'

Jacques looked at Zhirkov with surprise, shrugged his shoulders, and with an angry face went to the bottle. Zhirkov also shrugged his shoulders and followed Nadezhda Osipovna.

He looked at the lowering sky and the dirty road and thought.

'Dirt! what situations the evil spirit can drive a cultivated man into!'

Then he began to think of what was moral and what was immoral, of what was clean and of what was unclean. As it often happens to people who have got into unpleasant situations, he remembered with sadness his study with all the papers on his desk, and the work that had to be done, and he wished he were at home.

He went quickly through the sitting-room, past Jacques, who was fast asleep.

He was silent all the way to town, trying not to think of Jacques, whom for some reason he could not get out of his mind. This time he did not talk



to his driver. His conscience felt as uncomfortable as his stomach.

## THE THIEVES

THE hospital assistant, Ergunov, a feather-headed fellow, known in the whole district as a great boaster and drunkard, was returning late one night in the Christmas holidays from the small hamlet Repino, where he had been sent to make purchases for the hospital. That he should not be too late but return home quickly the doctor had lent him his best horse.

The weather was fairly fine when he started, but about eight o'clock a severe snowstorm began, and by the time he had got to within seven versts of the hospital he had quite lost his way. He was unable to guide his horse, for he could not see the road, and went on at random, trusting to the animal's instinct to find its way home. He rode on thus for about two hours; his horse was tired out, he himself thoroughly weary and frozen, and he began to think that instead of being on the way home he was going back to Repino. Suddenly above the noise of the storm he heard the deep baying of dogs and a dim red spot gleamed in front of him in the mist and snow. Gradually he could see through the darkness the black outlines of a high gateway and long palings which had sharp, pointed nails at the top; then beyond the palings he saw the crooked crane of a well. The wind chased away the snow-mist, and where he at first had only seen a red spot he could now distinguish the outlines of a small, low house with a high, reed-thatched roof. The house had three windows, in one of which a light shone through a red curtain.

What house could it be? Ergunov remembered that on the right of the road, about six or seven versts from the hospital, stood a little roadside inn belonging to Andrey Cherikov. He also remembered

that after the death of Cherikov, who had been killed by the postboys, the business of the inn had been carried on by his widow and his daughter Lyubka, who about two years before had come to the hospital for treatment. The inn had a bad reputation, and to turn in there late at night, with a horse that did not belong to you, was not without danger. But there was nothing else to be done. The hospital assistant felt in his pockets for his revolver, coughed, and tapped at the window with the stock of his riding-whip.

'Hullo! who's there?' he cried. 'Come, granny, let me in to get warm!'

A black dog rushed, barking hoarsely, head over heels under the horse's hoofs; it was followed by a white one, and then another black dog ran out at the head of eight others. Ergunov picked out the largest, and with all his strength struck it with his riding-whip. A small, long-legged dog raised its sharp muzzle and set up a piteous howl in a high-pitched, penetrating tone.

The hospital assistant stood a long time knocking at the window. At last, on the other side of the paling, he saw a light, near the door, which cast its rays on the frost-covered trees; the gate squeaked, and the figure of a woman, wrapped in shawls and with a lantern in her hand, appeared in the yard.

'Let me in, granny, to get warm,' said Ergunov; 'I was riding to the hospital and have lost my way. This is God-forsaken weather! Don't be afraid, granny, it's only one of your own people.'

'Our people are all at home, and we haven't invited strangers,' answered the figure severely, 'and why knock needlessly? The gate isn't looked.'

The assistant rode into the yard and stopped at the porch.

'Granny, tell your man to take my horse to the stable,' said he.

'I'm not granny.'



And indeed it was not granny. As she put out her lantern, her face became visible, and Ergunov saw the dark brows of Lyubka.

'Where can one find men to work nowadays?' said the girl, going into the house; 'some are drunk and asleep, and the others went to Repino in the morning and have not come back yet; it's holiday time.'

While he was tying up his horse in the shed, Ergunov heard a neigh, and saw through the darkness that there was already another horse there; groping about he felt that it had a Cossack saddle on its back, which meant that there was somebody else in the inn besides the family; so he thought it more prudent to unsaddle his horse and take his purchases along with the saddle into the house.

The first room he entered was a large one, well heated, and smelling of freshly-washed floors. A short, thin *muzhik* with a small red beard was sitting at the table under the icon; he wore a blue shirt and appeared about forty years of age. This was Kalashnikov, a notorious rogue and horse-stealer, whose father and uncle kept an eating-house in Bogalevka and traded wherever they could with stolen horses. He, too, had been to the hospital, more than once, not as a patient, but to talk with the doctor about horses—'Hadn't he a horse for sale, or would not the most honourable Mr. Doctor exchange his bay mare for a dun gelding?' Now his hair was well greased and he wore a silver earring in one of his ears and had in general a holiday appearance. With knitted brows and a falling lower lip, he sat looking at the pictures in a large and very tattered book. Stretched on the floor near the stove lay another *muzhik*, his face and shoulders and breast hidden by a short fur coat—he seemed to be sleeping. His new, high, leather boots with shining metal heels had formed two dark little pools on the floor, as the snow melted and dripped from them.

Kalashnikov said, 'How d'you do?' when he saw the hospital assistant enter the room.

'Yes, this is something like weather,' said Ergunov, rubbing his knees with the palms of his hands; 'the snow was blown under my collar. I'm sopping wet.—And I am afraid my revolver is not quite . . .'

He took his revolver out of its case, looked at it carefully from all sides, and put it back again. The revolver seemed to make no impression, and the *muzhik* continued to look at the pictures.

'Yes, beastly weather. I missed my way, and if it had not been for these dogs, I suppose it would have meant death in the snowdrift.—That would have been a nice job! Where are the women?'

'The old woman has gone to Repino, the girl is preparing supper,' answered Kalashnikov.

There was silence. Ergunov shivered and groaned, blew on his hands and cowered down near the stove, looking miserably cold and tired. In the yard the dogs continued to bark fiercely. Everything was dreary!

'You are from Bogalevka, aren't you?' asked the assistant, turning to the *muzhik*.

'Yes, I come from Bogalevka.'

For want of a better occupation, Ergunov began to think about Bogalevka, a village lying at the bottom of a deep ravine. On a moonlight night, if you drove along the highway and looked first down into the dark ravine and then up into the sky, it seemed as if the moon were suspended over a bottomless abyss, and that this was the end of the world. The road was so narrow and steep, with such sudden turnings, that when you had to drive to Bogalevka during an epidemic, or for a vaccination, you were obliged to shout at the top of your voice or to whistle the whole time, so as not to meet a cart at a place where there would be no possibility of crossing, and where you would never be able either to pass each other or turn back. The Bogalevka *muzhiks* were known as good gardeners and as horse-stealers. Their



orchards were rich with fruit trees; in spring the cherry trees disappeared under white blossom, and in summer the cherries were sold at three kopecks the pailful. If you paid three kopecks you could gather as many as you liked. The women were good-looking and well-fed and loved dress; even on week days they did no work, but sat all day on the mounds of earth that surrounded their cottages and searched in each other's hair.

At last steps were heard and Lyubka came into the room. She was a girl of about twenty, with a red dress and bare feet. She crossed the room two or three times, looking each time out of the corner of her eye at the hospital assistant. She did not simply walk, but minced her steps and threw her breasts well forward; she seemed to enjoy walking on the freshly washed floor with her bare feet; she had evidently taken off her boots specially to do it.

Something seemed to amuse Kalashnikov, and he beckoned to her with his finger. She went up to the table, and he showed her a print representing the Prophet Elijah driving a chariot and three horses to heaven. Lyubka leaned on the table, and her plait fell over her shoulder. It was a long plait of red hair, tied at the end with a red ribbon, and it almost touched the floor. She too laughed.

'Admirable! A remarkable picture!' said Kalashnikov, 'very remarkable!' he repeated, and made a gesture as if he wanted to take Elijah's reins into his own hands.

The wind howled in the stove, and something groaned and squeaked, just like a great dog suffocating a rat.

'You hear that? The witches are about,' said Lyubka.

'It's the wind,' said Kalashnikov. He was silent for a time, and then looking at Ergunov, asked, 'What is your opinion as a scholar, Osip Vassilich? are there witches and devils in this world?'

'How can I answer that, my friend?' said Ergunov,

shrugging one shoulder. 'If you judge it from a scientific point of view, there aren't any devils, because that's only a superstition. But looking at it plainly as you and I do now—well, there are devils. To put it shortly, in my life I have often come across them. When I finished my studies, I entered the Dragoons' hospital as medical assistant, and, of course, went to the front, where I won a medal and the order of the Red Cross. After the peace of San Stefano I returned to Russia and entered the service of the *Zemstvo*.<sup>1</sup> On account of my exceptional experience of the world, I may say that I have also had occasion to see devils—not the devils with horns and tails—that's all nonsense—but, so to speak, the devils that are within us.'

'Where?' asked Kalashnikov.

'In many places. To go no further, only last summer, I can remember, I met him here at this very door one evening. I was driving—I remember it well—to Golischkino to vaccinate some people. I had the racing *droshki*, as usual, and a good horse, and all the necessary paraphernalia; yes—and besides I had my watch on me and all the rest, so I took every precaution, fearing that the hour might be—h'm—who's to know what ruffians there are about? . . . As I approached the Snake Valley—curse it—and was beginning to descend, suddenly some such person came towards me. Black hair—black eyes—his whole face dark, as if dirtied with soot! He came straight up to me and took hold of the left rein. "Stop!" He examined the horse, then, you understand, looked at me; he then let go of the rein, and without using any bad words, said: "Where are you going?" He had broken teeth and fierce eyes.—"Ah, you old joker!" thought I. "I'm going to a vaccination. But what's that to you?" "If that's so," said

<sup>1</sup> The *Zemstvos* are the elective district and provincial Assemblies created by Alexander II for the self-government of the various provinces of Russia.



he, "then vaccinate me," and he bared his arm and stuck it under my nose. Of course, I didn't want to have words, so I just vaccinated him to get rid of the fellow. Afterwards I looked at my lancet and it was quite rusty.'

The *muzhik* who had been sleeping near the stove suddenly turned round and threw his short fur coat from his shoulders, and the assistant saw the same stranger that had met him that time in the Snake Valley. The hair, beard, and eyes of this *muzhik* were as black as soot, his complexion was dark, and he had a black spot the size of a lentil on his right cheek. With a laugh he looked at the assistant and said:

'I caught hold of the rein, it is true, but all that about the vaccination is rot, sir. There was not even a word about vaccination between us.'

The hospital assistant became confused.

'I was not talking about you,' said he. 'Why do you get up if you are resting?'

The dark *muzhik* had never been to the hospital, so Ergunov did not know who he was or where he came from, and on looking at him now, he thought he must be a gipsy. The *muzhik* got up, stretched himself and yawned loudly; going to the table he sat down next to Lyubka and Kalashnikov, and began looking at the pictures with them. On his sleepy face there was a look of admiration and jealousy.

'Look here, Merik,' Lyubka said to him, 'you get me horses like those and I will drive to heaven.'

'Sinners can't get to heaven,' said Kalashnikov; 'it's only for the saints.'

Then Lyubka got up and put on the table a large piece of bacon, some salted cucumbers, a wooden platter with a hash of boiled beef, and a frying-pan on which fried sausages and cabbage were still frizzling merrily; she also brought a cut-glass decanter of vodka, which when poured into the glasses spread an odour of orange-peel over the room.

Ergunov felt offended that Kalashnikov and the swarthy gipsy talked together and paid no attention to him, just as if he were not in the room. He wanted to talk to them, to boast, to drink, to eat, and if possible to flirt with Lyubka. She had come several times into the room while they were having supper; she had sat down next to him and, as if by accident, touched him with her pretty shoulders, and then passed her hands down her shapely hips. She was a healthy, merry, active girl, who could never be quiet. She was always sitting down or jumping up, and when seated moved about all the time, like a willow twig, now turning her breasts, now her back, to her neighbour, and constantly touching him with her knee or her elbow.

Ergunov was also annoyed that the *muzhiks* drank only one glass of vodka each and would take no more; it seemed wrong to drink alone. However he could not resist it, and drank another glass and then a third and finished the whole of the sausage. To prevent the *muzhiks* from ignoring him, he determined to try what flattery would do.

'You have some clever fellows in Bogalevka,' said he, turning to them.

'How are they clever?' asked Kalashnikov.

'Come now—in *that* way—about horse-flesh.'

'Clever fellows indeed! Only drunkards and thieves.'

'There was a time . . . but that's past,' said Merik, after a short pause. 'There's only old Filya left, and he's blind.'

'Yes, only Filya,' sighed Kalashnikov. 'If you come to reckon it up, he must be about seventy. He has only got one eye—the German Colonists knocked out the other—and can't see much with the one he's got left—yes, cataract. At one time when the village constable saw him, he would call out: "*Shamyl!*"<sup>1</sup> *Hullo, Shamyl!* Now the only

<sup>1</sup> The leader of the tribes of the Caucasus in their wars against Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century.



name he goes by is "Squinting Filya." Yes, he was a jolly good fellow! Once he went with the late Andrey Grigorievich (he's dead now, poor chap—Lyubka's father, you know), and that night they got near Roshnova; a cavalry regiment was quartered there at the time—they drove away nine of the soldiers' horses—chose the best too. The guards heard nothing! The next morning they sold the lot for twenty silver roubles to gipsy Avonka. Yes, and now if they succeed in driving off some man's nag while he's asleep or drunk and (the godless wretches!) take off the poor devil's boots too, they tremble with fright and ride a couple of hundred versts to sell the wretched beast. Then they'll haggle and haggle like old Jews, till the police run them in—the fools! It is no sport now, it's nothing but disgrace—a rotten lot, you can call them.'

'But Merik?' asked Lyubka.

'He's not one of us. He's a Kharkov man from Mizhiricha. He's good enough, that's true. He's a clever chap, there's no use denying.'

Lyubka looked slyly and admiringly at Merik and said:

'It wasn't for nothing that the kind people bathed him in a hole cut in the ice.'

'How did that happen?' asked Ergunov.

'This is how it was,' said Merik, laughing. 'Filya had run off with three horses from the Samoylov farmers, and they went for me. There are about ten Samoylov farmers, and with their labourers they might be, all told, some thirty, and all Molokans.<sup>1</sup> So one of them says to me, at the market, "Come along, Merik, and look at the new horses we have brought from the fair." I, of course, wanted to see their animals, so I went, but when I got there, they surrounded me—thirty of them—tied my arms behind me, and carried me off to the river. "Now we'll show you the horses," said they. There was

<sup>1</sup> One of the sects of the Orthodox Church who, contrary to the usual custom, drink milk during fasts.

already a hole cut in the ice; six feet away they cut another. Then, you know, they took a rope and passed it round me with a loop under my arms, and tied a crooked pole to the other end, so that, you see, it could get from one hole to the other. Then they stuck it through under the ice and tugged at it, while I—just as I was, in my fur coat and high boots—was shoved into the hole. They stood round and poked at me, some with their feet, some with crowbars, and at last drew me under the ice to the other hole and pulled me out.'

Lyubka shuddered and trembled all over.

'At first I felt all in a glow from the cold water,' continued Merik; 'but when they drew me out to the surface I had no strength left at all and lay down in the snow, and the Molokans all stood round and beat my knees and elbows with sticks. It hurt me terribly! They beat me and then went away. I was freezing—my clothes turned to ice. I tried to get up but couldn't. As luck would have it, an old woman drove past and brought me home.'

In the meantime Ergunov had drunk five or six glasses of vodka, and his spirits rose. He wanted to tell a tale, something astonishing and grand, something wonderful, to show that he too was a fine spark and afraid of nothing.

'Now this is what happened to us in the Pensa government,' he began.

Perhaps because he had drunk so much and his eyes were getting dim, or perhaps because he had more than once been caught drawing the long bow, the *muzhiks* paid no further attention to him and did not even answer his questions. Regardless of his presence they talked together about their own affairs so openly that it made him cold and nervous, and he felt that they thought him a nonentity.

Kalashnikov's manners were sedate, like those of a man of position; he spoke deliberately and with precision, made the sign of the cross over his mouth each time he yawned, and nobody would have



thought that he was a thief—a heartless thief who robbed the poor and had more than once been in prison. He had been condemned by the Commune to transportation to Siberia, and had only been reprieved because his father and his uncle, both thieves like himself, had stood bail for him. Merik behaved like a fop. He saw that Lyubka and Kalashnikov admired him, and besides that he thought himself a very fine fellow, so he tried to show off. Sometimes he sat with his arms akimbo; then he would throw out his chest, or stretch his limbs till the bench on which he was sitting creaked under him.

After supper Kalashnikov crossed himself and bowed before the icon, and pressed Merik's hand before he got up from the table. Merik also crossed himself and shook Kalashnikov's hand. Lyubka cleared away the supper things and scattered on the table honey-cakes, nuts, and pumpkin seeds; she also brought in two bottles of sweet wine.

'Andrey Grigorievich, may he inherit the heavenly kingdom, and may eternal rest be his!' said Kalashnikov, clinking glasses with Merik. 'When he was alive, we used to meet here or at brother Martin's, and my God, my God! what men they were! What conversations.—Remarkable conversations! There was Martin and Filya and Stukotey—old Fedor—all honourable, right-minded men. Ah, what jolly times we had, what jolly times . . . what jolly times!'

Lyubka left the room, but soon returned with a green handkerchief on her head and beads around her neck.

'Merik, just look what Kalashnikov brought me to-day,' she said.

She looked at herself in the glass and shook her head several times to make the beads jingle. She then opened a trunk and began taking things out of it: first a print dress with red and blue spots, then a red one with flounces that rustled and crackled

like paper, then a new blue shawl with rainbow-coloured borders: all these she showed them and laughed and clapped her hands as if astonished that she possessed such treasures.

Kalashnikov in the meantime had tuned his *balalayka*, and he began to play. Ergunov could not make out if the tune he played were sad or merry; at times it was so plaintive that he wanted to cry, then again it became wild and gay. Suddenly Merik began to dance. He sprang up, stamped his feet, and clicked his heels together, all on the same spot, and then spreading his arms wide he started running on his heels towards the stove and from the stove to the trunk; then he sprang up as if in terror, and struck his metal heels together while he was in the air; then squatting down he began throwing out first one leg and then the other, his movements growing all the time more and more rapid. Lyubka, waving her arms, gave a little cry of despair and followed him. At first she sidled along slowly, maliciously, as if she wanted to creep up to him and strike him in the back; she kept time with her heels, just as Merik did, by knocking his heel taps together; then she whirled round like a top and suddenly sat down on the floor, so that her red dress spread out like a bell. Looking fiercely at her and clicking his teeth together, Merik approached her, still in a squatting attitude, as if he wished to destroy her with his terrible legs; but she sprang up, threw her head back, spread her arms like the wings of a great bird, and flew across the room, seeming hardly to touch the floor with her feet.

'Ah! what a fiery girl,' thought the hospital assistant, as he sat down on the trunk to watch the dance. 'What fire! She's priceless—you can give her all you possess, and still it would not be nearly enough!'

He was sorry that he was a hospital assistant and not a *muzhik*. Why did he wear a jacket and a chain with a gilt watch-key instead of a blue shirt



'Ah, if only the devil would carry off Merik!' thought he.

The lamp before the *icon* flickered for the last time and went out with a splutter. Somebody, probably Merik, entered the room, and sat down on the bench. He took a whiff of his pipe, and for a moment his swarthy cheek with the black spot was lit up. Ergunov felt a tickle in the throat from the bad tobacco.

'You have beastly tobacco, damn it!' said the assistant, 'it makes me sick!'

'I mix my tobacco with the flowers of oats,' said Merik after a pause; 'it is softer to the chest.'

He smoked for a short time, spat, and left the room. About half an hour later a light appeared in the entrance. Merik stood there in his short fur coat and fur cap; Lyubka followed him, with a candle in her hand.

'Merik, do stay,' said Lyubka in an imploring voice, 'do!'

'No, Lyubka, don't keep me.'

'Listen, Merik,' said Lyubka, and her voice became soft and caressing; 'I know that you will find out where mother keeps her money, and that you will kill both her and me, and that you will go to Kuban to love other girls, but God be with you! I only ask one thing, sweetheart, stay here now!'

'No, I want to go for a ride,' said Merik, as he fastened his belt.

'But how can you go for a ride? You have no horse, you came here on foot.'

Merik bent down and whispered something in Lyubka's ear; she looked at the door and laughed between her tears.

'And he's asleep, the bloated devil!'

Merik held her to him, gave her a hearty kiss, and went out. Ergunov stuck his revolver into his pocket, jumped up quickly, and ran after him.

'Get out of the way,' he said to Lyubka, who had hastily closed the door of the entrance, bolted

it, and placed herself before it. 'Let me out! What do you mean by blocking the way?'

'Why do you want to go out?'

'To look after my horse.'

Lyubka looked at him slyly and lovingly from head to toe.

'What is the use of looking at it? Look at me,' she said, bending down and touching the gilt watch-key that hung from his chain.

'Let me pass, or he will ride off on my horse,' said Ergunov; 'let me pass, you devil!' he cried, striking her violently on the shoulder, and with his whole strength he tried to shove her away from the door, but she held firmly to the bolt and seemed to be made of iron. 'Let go,' he cried, exhausted with the struggle. 'He'll ride away, I tell you!'

'How can he? He won't run off with it.'

She breathed heavily and rubbed her shoulder, which pained her, and once again looked at him from top to toe, blushed, and laughed.

'Don't go away, sweetheart,' she said. 'I am dull all alone.'

The assistant looked into her eyes, thought a moment, and embraced her; she did not resist.

'Now, don't play the fool. Let me pass,' he begged.

She was silent.

'I heard you tell Merik just now that you love him,' said he.

'What does that prove? My thoughts know whom I love.'

She again touched the watch-key.

'Give it to me?'

The assistant unfastened the key and gave it to her. She suddenly stretched her neck; her face grew serious, and her expression appeared to Ergunov to become cold and sly; he remembered his horse, shoved her to one side quite easily, and ran into the yard. Under the shed a pig grunted lazily, and a cow knocked with her horns against the manger.



The assistant struck a match, and saw the pig, and the cow, and the dogs that came running from all sides towards the light; but there were no signs of the horse, and even its tracks were covered up by the snow. Shouting and waving his arms to keep off the dogs, he rushed out, wading through the snowdrifts, and almost falling he reached the gate and looked out on all sides. He strained his eyes, but could see nothing but the scudding clouds and the strange figures formed by the drifting snow. Once the laughing face of a corpse seemed to look out of the darkness, another time you could see forms like a galloping white horse ridden by an Amazon in a muslin riding-habit, or a long flock of white swans flew overhead. Shaking with rage and cold and knowing he could do nothing, Ergunov fired his revolver among the dogs that surrounded him, and hurried back to the house.

When he got into the entrance he distinctly heard some one moving rapidly in the room and the slamming of a door. The room was quite dark. Ergunov knocked up against the door—it was locked; lighting one match after another he hurried into the passage, and passing through the kitchen came to a little room, where petticoats and dresses were hanging all round the wall, and where there was a smell of cornflower and fennel. In the corner near the stove stood a bed with quite a mound of pillows on it; he thought it must be the room of the old woman, Lyubka's mother. From this room he went into another, also a small one, where he found Lyubka. She was lying on a trunk pretending to be asleep, and covered over with a patchwork quilt, which was made of many coloured bits of chintz. Above her head an *icon* lamp burnt dimly.

'Where is my horse?' he demanded fiercely.

Lyubka did not move.

'Where's my horse, I ask you?' shouted Ergunov more fiercely, and he tore off her coverlet. 'I ask you—you she-devil!' he cried.

She jumped up and fell on her knees, holding her shift around her with one hand and trying to get at the quilt with the other, as she cowered near the wall. She looked at the assistant with disgust and fear, and her eyes, like the eyes of a captured animal, followed all his movements.

'Tell me where my horse is, or I will squeeze the soul out of your body,' shouted Ergunov.

'Get away, you brute!' she said in a hoarse voice.

The assistant caught hold of her shift near the neck and tore it off, and then he could not resist hugging her with all his strength; she cried out with rage and slipped away from his embrace; she liberated one arm (the other was entangled in the torn shift), and gave him a blow on the crown of the head with her fist.

He felt giddy with pain in the head, and had ringing and thumping sounds in his ears, and staggered backwards; again he received a blow, this time on the temple. Staggering and catching hold of the door-post to prevent himself from falling, he managed to get into the room where he had left his things and lay down on the bench. After lying a short time he got up, took out his box of matches, and began to light them, one after another, without any object; he lit one and blew it out, then another, until all were used up.

In the meantime the sky began to brighten and the air became blue. The cooks crowed in the yard. His head ached, and he had a noise in his ears, like the sound you hear when you are under a railway-bridge and a train passes over your head. He got into his fur coat and cap with difficulty; he could not find his saddle nor the parcel with his purchases. The bag was empty; he now understood why he had heard some one hurry away when he had come into the house from the yard.

He took the poker to keep off the dogs and went out, leaving the door wide open. The snowstorm was over, and all was quiet in the yard. When he



got out of the gate the white fields looked dead, not a bird was to be seen in the morning sky. On both sides of the road and in the far distance he could only see the blue, stunted fir trees rising above the snow.

Ergunov began to think of his reception at the hospital when he got back, and to wonder what the doctor would say to him; it was essential to think this matter over, and to be prepared to answer any questions that might be asked him, but he could not collect his thoughts, they seemed to escape from him. He went along, and could think only of Lyubka and the *muzhiks* with whom he had passed the night; he remembered how Lyubka, after she had struck him for the second time, had bent down to pick up the quilt from the floor, and how her hair, which had come unplaited, touched the floor. There was a muddle in his head, and he asked himself why there were doctors, hospital assistants, merchants and clerks and *muzhiks* in the world, and not simply free people. 'There are free birds and free beasts—a free Merik; and they fear nothing, and want nobody. Whose invention is it? Who has ordained that you must get up in the morning, dine at midday, and go to bed in the evening; that the doctor is the chief and his assistant must obey him; that you must live in rooms and love only one wife? Why not just the contrary, that you must dine in the night and sleep in the day? Ah, if you could jump on a horse without asking whose it is, and ride a race with the wind like the very devil over the fields, the woods, the ravines—love any girl, and laugh at the whole world!'

Ergunov threw the poker into the snow and sat down, resting his forehead against the cold, white trunk of a birch-tree, and thought of his grey, monotonous life, his poor wages, his subordination, the work in the dispensary, the constant bother with the patients; it all appeared to him despicable, sickening. . . .

'Who says that dissipation is a sin?' he asked himself with vexation. 'Only those who have never lived a free life, like Merik, like Kalashnikov—those who have never loved Lyubka. They have toiled all their life long, have lived without pleasure, and loved only their wives, like frogs.'

He thought about himself, that if he had not as yet become a thief, a scoundrel, or even a highway robber, it was only because he did not know how to, or had not found an opportunity.

It was about a year and a half later that one night in spring, shortly after Easter, Ergunov, who had long since been dismissed from the hospital and had not been able to find another post, came out of the Repino tavern. It was late at night, and he went roaming about the village without any object.

He turned into the fields. They smelt of spring, and a warm breeze was blowing. A calm, starry night looked down on the earth from the sky. 'My God, how vast the sky is, and how immeasurably it is spread over the universe! The world is well created, but why and for what object', thought Ergunov, 'have the people divided each other into sober men and drunkards, into those who are in service and those who have been discharged, and so on? Why does the sober and satisfied man sleep peacefully in his home, while the drunken and hungry are obliged to roam about the fields and cannot find shelter? Why is it that he who has no work and receives no wages must be hungry, without clothes and boots? Who invented this?—Why do not the birds of the air and the beasts of the fields work and receive wages? They live for their own pleasure!'

Far away in the distance, just above the horizon, a red glow flickered in the sky. Ergunov stood long and looked at it, and continued thinking: if the day before he had stolen somebody's samovar and drunk it away at the tavern it would be a crime. Why?



Two carts passed along the high-road close to where he was standing. In one an old woman was fast asleep, and in the other sat an old man without a hat.

'Where's the fire, gaffer?' asked Ergunov.

'Andrey Cherikov's inn is burning,' answered the old man.

Then the hospital assistant remembered what had happened to him in that inn a year and a half before, when Merik had boasted of what he would do! and he imagined how the bodies of the murdered old woman and Lyubka were burning in the ruins, and he envied Merik. As he returned to the tavern and looked at the houses of the rich innkeepers, horse-dealers, and smiths he thought: 'What a good thing it would be some night to break into a rich man's house!'

*Handwritten note:*  
 I stand for Beauty  
 and Safety:-  
 every one should  
 keep it in his  
 mind.

# 'MAXIM GORKI' (PESHKOV)

1868-1936

## IN THE STEPPES

We left Perekop in the very worst of humours—as hungry as wolves, and angry with the whole world. For more than twelve hours we had laboured unsuccessfully, employing all our talents and efforts, to steal or earn something, and when at last we became convinced that we could not succeed one way or the other, we decided to move on. Where? Anywhere—so long as we moved on.

We were ready to continue along precisely the same path of life we had long been following—this was silently decided by each of us, and shone plainly in the surly glare of our hungry eyes.

We were three: we had all but lately met, having knocked up against each other accidentally in a public-house in Kherson, on the banks of the Dnieper. One of us had been a soldier in a railway battalion, and afterwards, it appeared, foreman of a gang on one of the Vistula railways. He was a red-haired, muscular man with cold, grey eyes. He could speak German, and had a very intimate knowledge of prison life. Fellows of our class dislike talking much about their past, having always more or less well-founded reasons for silence; we therefore believed each other—at least outwardly we appeared to believe, for in his heart each of us had but little belief in himself.

When our second companion, a small, lean man with thin lips always sceptically pressed together,



told us he had been a student of Moscow University, the soldier and I accepted it as a fact. Indeed, it was all the same to us if at any previous time he had been student, detective, or thief—one thing only was important, that at the moment of our acquaintance he should be our equal: hungry, enjoying the special attention of the police in the towns and the suspicion of the *muzhiks* in the villages; that he should hate both the one and the other with the hatred of a weak, hunted, hungry beast; that he should dream of universal revenge on all and everything; in a word, that both by his position among the monarchs of nature and the rulers of life, and by his own frame of mind, he should be a fruit of the same tree as ourselves.

The third was myself. Out of the modesty inherent in me from my earliest years, I will say not a word about my own qualities, but not wishing to appear naive to you I will be silent also about my defects; still, by way of giving some clue to my characteristics, I will only add that I always thought myself better than others, and continue in the same opinion with undiminished success to this day.

Thus it was we left Perekop and went on farther, reckoning for the first day on the shepherds, from whom one could always beg for bread and who seldom refused a passing stranger.

I walked in front with the soldier, the student followed us. Thrown over his shoulders he had something that resembled a jacket; the remains of a broad-brimmed hat reposed on his sharp, angular, and closely cropped head. His thin legs were clad in tight-fitting trousers which had patches of many colours, and on the soles of his feet he had fastened with cords plaited out of strips torn from the lining of his jacket some object made of the upper of a high-boot he had found on the road. He called this contrivance 'sandals.' He walked along in silence, kicking up a cloud of dust with his feet and

blinking with his little greenish eyes. The soldier was dressed in a red cotton shirt, which he said he had acquired with his own hands in Kherson; over his shirt he wore a warm, wadded waistcoat; on his head was an old military cap of an undecided colour, which he wore according to the military regulations, well tilted on the right eyebrow; his legs were clad in wide flapping Cossack knickerbockers, his feet were bare.

I too was clothed but bare-footed. Along we went, and around us on all sides stretched in noble luxuriance the undulating steppes, which as they lay there resembled a huge black dish covered over by the sultry, cloudless blue dome of the summer sky. The dusty, grey road cut through it like a broad band, and burned our feet. Sometimes we passed strips of stubbly and freshly reaped corn-field, which had a strange similarity to the soldier's long unshaven cheeks.

The soldier went along singing in a hoarse bass voice:

‘Thy holy resurrection we sing and praise.’

During his time of service he had held a position in the church of the regiment not unlike that of precentor, and he knew an endless number of hymns, psalms, and chants, which knowledge he frequently misused when our conversation flagged.

Before us on the horizon rose softly outlined forms, delicately coloured in tints from lilac to pale rose.

‘Those are evidently the Crimean hills,’ said the student in a dry voice.

‘Hills?’ cried the soldier. ‘You see them rather soon, my friend. They are clouds, only clouds. Look at them—just like cranberry jelly with milk.’

I remarked how pleasant it would be if the clouds were really made of jelly. This at once aroused our hunger—the curse of our days.

‘Oh, the devil!’—the soldier swore and spat—‘if we could only meet one living soul! There’s



nobody! We shall have to suck our paws as the bears do in winter.'

'I told you we ought to make for more inhabited places,' said the student didactically.

'You told us!' answered the soldier irritably. 'You're a scholar, so you must talk. Where are the inhabited places here? The devil only knows where they are!'

The student remained silent and pressed his lips together. The sun was setting and the clouds on the horizon shone with many colours that words cannot describe. There was a smell of earth and salt.

This dry and tasty scent only made our appetites sharper.

Our stomachs shrank together. It was a strange and unpleasant sensation; it appeared as though from all the muscles of our bodies the juices were gradually draining away, evaporating, and the muscles losing their vital suppleness. A feeling of prickly dryness filled our mouths and throats, our heads grew dizzy, and all the time black spots appeared and disappeared before our eyes. Sometimes they took the form of steaming pieces of meat, or loaves of bread; our memory gave these 'visions of the past, dumb visions,' their characteristic smells, and then it was like a knife being turned about in our entrails.

However, we went on describing our feelings to each other, and keeping a sharp eye on every side, hoping to see somewhere a flock of sheep and listening to hear the shrill squeaking of a Tartar's cart, carrying fruit to an Armenian bazaar.

But the steppes were empty and silent.

On the eve of this hard day the three of us had eaten four pounds of rye bread and five water melons, and had walked about forty versts,—the outlay was not in proportion to the income,—and when we had fallen asleep in the market-place at Perekop we were awakened by hunger.

The student had very justly advised us not to

lie down and sleep, but to occupy ourselves during the night . . . in decent society, however, it is not the custom to talk aloud about plans for the violation of private property, so I hold my peace. I only want to be truthful, but it is not in my interest to be rude. I know that people are growing every day more soft-hearted in our highly cultivated era, and even when they take their neighbour by the throat with the evident intention of throttling him, they try to do so with the greatest possible kindness, observing all the propriety suitable to the occasion. The experience of my own throat obliges me to mark this progress in morals, and I can affirm with a pleasant feeling of certainty that everything develops and improves in this world. In particular, this wonderful progress is weightily confirmed by the yearly increase in the number of prisons, public-houses, and *maisons de tolérance*.

Thus, feeling famished and trying by friendly talk to forget the pain in our stomachs, we went on through the waste and silent steppes, under the rays of the setting sun, in the faint hope of finding something. Before us the sun was quietly sinking into soft clouds, which were richly coloured by its rays, while behind us and on both sides a blue dimness seemed to rise from the steppes up to the sky and narrow the inhospitable horizon around us.

'Brothers, let us collect material for a fire,' said the soldier, picking up a small log of wood from the road. 'We shall have to pass the night in the steppes . . . there'll be a heavy dew. Dry cow dung, twigs—take everything.'

We separated and began to collect whatever we could by the roadside: twigs, dry steppe grass, and anything that would burn. Every time we had to bend down, we were seized all through our bodies with a terrible longing to fall down to the ground, to lie there immovable and eat of the earth, the black, fat earth, to eat much of it, to eat until we could eat no more, and then to fall asleep. To fall asleep



perhaps for ever, only first to eat, to chew, to feel the warm, black porridge slowly going down from the mouth through the parched gullet into the craving, shrunken stomach, which was burning with desire to absorb anything.

'If we could only find some sort of roots,' sighed the soldier. 'There are some edible roots . . .'

But in the black, ploughed earth there were no roots. The southern night came on quickly, and the last rays of the setting sun had not time to die away before the stars began to shine in the dark blue sky, and around us the black shadows blended together more closely and narrowed the endless flatness of the steppes that surrounded us.

'Brothers,' the student said in an undertone, 'there—to the left—a man is lying.'

'A man?' said the soldier doubtfully: 'Why should he be lying there?'

'Go and ask him. He is sure to have bread, as he has settled down in the steppe,' explained the student. The soldier looked in the direction where the man was lying, and spitting with determination said, 'Let us go to him.'

Only the sharp green eyes of the student could have made out that the dark heap, some fifty *sazhenes*<sup>1</sup> to the left of the road, was a man. We went towards him, stepping quickly over the furrows of the ploughed field and sensible how the new-born hope of food sharpened our appetites. We were quite close to him. The man did not move.

'Perhaps it is not a man,' said the soldier gloomily, expressing the thought in all our minds.

But at that very moment our doubts were dispelled, for the heap that was lying on the ground began to move and rise. We saw it was a real live man, kneeling down and stretching out his arms towards us.

He spoke to us in a dull, trembling voice: 'Don't come near me; I shall shoot you.'

<sup>1</sup> About 350 feet.

A dry, sharp crack resounded in the dull air.

We stopped as if by command and were silent for a few seconds, stupefied by this unamiable reception.

'The villain!' mumbled the soldier expressively.

'Y-e-s—' the student said reflectively; 'he goes about with a revolver—it's clear he's a fish with roe.'

'Ho!' shouted the soldier; he had evidently decided on some plan.

The man did not change his position and remained silent.

'Ho, you there! We won't touch you, only give us some bread. I expect you've got some. Give us some, brother, for Christ's sake. May you be cursed—damned!'

The last words the soldier mumbled in his beard. The man remained silent.

'Do you hear?' the soldier continued, trembling with rage and despair. 'Give us some bread. We won't come near you. Throw it to us.'

'All right!' said the man shortly.

He might have said to us, 'My dear brethren,' and if he had poured into those three Christian words all the purest, holiest feelings, they would not have excited us as much, nor made us feel as human, as that dull, short 'All right' did.

'Do not be afraid of us, good man,' said the soldier gently with a sweet smile on his face, though the man could not see his smile, as he was at a distance of at least twenty paces from us. 'We are peaceful men going from Russia to Kuban—money failed us on the way—we have eaten up all we had, and this is the second day we have been without food.'

'Catch!' said our benefactor, waving his hand in the air, and something black flew past and fell in the ploughed field not far from us. The student hurried to pick it up.

'Catch again! again! I have no more.'

When the student had collected this strange gift, we found that we had about four pounds of dry wheaten bread. It was covered with earth and very



dry. Dry bread is more satisfying than new bread, as there is less moisture in it.

'There, and there, and there,' said the soldier, carefully dividing the pieces. 'Stop—they are not equal!—Now then you, professor, I must pinch a little bit from you, or he will have too little . . .'

The student submitted without question to the loss of a small piece of bread of about one-tenth of an ounce in weight. I received it and put it in my mouth.

I chewed it, chewed it slowly, with difficulty restraining the nervous action of my jaws, which were ready to crunch stones. The hurried, spasmodic movement of my gullet caused me great pleasure, and I satisfied it in small quantities. Morsel after morsel, warm, incomprehensibly, indescribably tasty morsels, entered my burning stomach and seemed instantly to be transformed into blood and brains. Joy, such a strange, quiet, and vivifying joy, warmed my heart, in proportion to the food that entered my stomach, and my whole system seemed as in a doze. I forgot those accursed days of chronic hunger, I forgot my companions, being entirely immersed in the enjoyment of the feelings I was now experiencing.

But when I had thrown the last crumbs of bread from the palm of my hand into my mouth, I felt still a terrible desire to eat.

'He must still have some lard or meat, damn him,' grumbled the soldier, who was sitting on the ground near me rubbing his stomach.

'He must have, for the bread smelt of meat. He will have kept some bread too,' said the student, and added in an undertone, 'if it were not for that revolver . . .'

'Who is he? Eh?'

'Evidently one of us Ishmaels . . .'

'A dog!' decided the soldier.

We sat close together and cast sidelong glances at the place where our benefactor with the revolver

was sitting. Neither sound nor sign of life reached us from there.

The night drew its dark forces around us. The silence of death was in the steppes; we could hear each other's breathing. Now and then the melancholy whistle of a marmot could be heard. The stars—those live flowers of the sky—shone above us. We wanted to eat.

I say it with pride—on that strange night I was neither worse nor better than my chance companions. I proposed that we should get up and go for that man. 'We need not touch him, but we can eat all he has. He may shoot—let him! He can only hit one of the three, if he hits at all. And even if he does hit, a revolver shot is not likely to kill.'

'Let's go,' said the soldier, jumping up.

The student got up more slowly than he did.

So we went almost running, the student keeping a little behind us.

'Comrade!' shouted the soldier reproachfully.

We were met by a low grumble and the sharp snap of the cock; there was a flash of light and the dry sound of a shot reached our ears.

'Missed!' cried the soldier joyfully, and in a single bound he reached the man. 'Now, you devil, I'll give it you . . .'

The student pounced on the knapsack. But the devil fell from his knees on to his back, spread out his arms, and gasped.

'What the deuce is this?' said the soldier in a tone of surprise; he had already raised his foot to give the man a kick. 'Can he have fired at himself? You! You there! Eh? Have you shot yourself?'

'Here's meat, and cakes of some kind, and bread: a lot, brothers!' shouted the student with delight.

'Then go to the devil! You may give up the ghost! Let's eat, my boys!' cried the soldier. I took the revolver out of the man's hand, who had now ceased to gasp and was lying quite still. There was only one shot left in the revolver.



We ate again, ate in silence. The man lay there silent too, not moving a single limb. We took no notice of him.

A hoarse and trembling voice suddenly said: 'Was this done only for bread, my dear brothers?'

We all started. The student cleared his throat and bending to the earth began to cough.

The soldier finished chewing what he had in his mouth and uttered many oaths.

'You soul of a dog! May you burst like a dry trough! Do you think we wanted to skin you? What good would it be to us? A fool's snout, an unclean soul! A nice thing—arming himself and shooting at people! Damn you!'

He swore while he was eating, which took from his curses all their expressiveness and strength.

'Just wait—when we have eaten we will settle with you,' said the student ominously.

Then in the stillness of the night the sound of whimpering sobs frightened us.

'Brothers—as if I knew! I fired because I was afraid. I am going from New Athos to the Smolensk Government.—Oh, good Lord! The fever seizes me—as soon as the sun sets.—It's my misfortune.—To escape the fever I left Athos.—Did joinery there.—I'm a joiner.—Have a wife at home—two girls—three years—nearly four—have not seen them—brothers!—Eat everything . . .'

'We shall eat everything, never fear. You needn't ask us,' said the student.

'Good God! Had I only known that you were peaceful, good people—would I have thought of firing?—It was the steppes, brothers—night.—Forgive me!—Eh?'

He talked and cried, or rather gave out a trembling, frightened whimper.

'Snivel away,' said the soldier contemptuously.

'He must have money on him,' suggested the student.

The soldier half-closed his eyes, looked at him, and smiled.

'You're cute! Let's make up a fire and go to sleep.'

'And he?' inquired the student.

'He may go to the devil! We can't roast him, can we?'

'We ought to,' and the student shook his sharp head.

We went for the stuff we had collected but dropped when the joiner had arrested us with his cry, brought it up, and were soon seated round a fire. It smouldered slowly in the windless night, and lighted up the small space where we were seated. We were getting sleepy, although we would gladly have supped again. 'Brothers!' the joiner called to us. He was lying three paces from us, and at times it seemed to me that he was whispering something to himself.

'Yes,' answered the soldier.

'May I come to you—to the fire? I feel death approaching—all my bones ache.—Good Lord!—I see I shall never get home.'

'Crawl here,' the student gave permission.

The joiner moved slowly along the ground towards the fire, just as if he were afraid to lose an arm or a leg. He was tall but terribly thin; every part of him shook strangely, and his dim eyes reflected the pain that was eating him up. In the light of our fire his drawn and haggard face had a yellow, earthy, corpse-like colour. He trembled all over, and aroused our contempt and pity. Stretching his long thin hands to the fire he rubbed his bony fingers, and their joints bent slowly, flabbily. At last it was repulsive to look at him.

'Why did you come in such a condition—and on foot too? Stingy, eh?' the soldier asked surlily.

'I was advised—don't go by water, they said—go through the Crimea—air, they said. And now I can't walk any more—I'm dying, brothers—I shall die alone in the steppes.—The birds will peck at me—nobody will know—my wife, the girls, will wait for me.—I wrote to them—and my bones will be washed by the rain in the steppes.—Good Lord! Good Lord!'



His whine was like the sad howl of a wounded wolf.

'Oh, the devil!' cried the enraged soldier, jumping up; 'what are you whimpering for? Why can't you leave people in peace? Are you dying? Well then, die, but be quiet! Who wants you? Hold your tongue!'

'Give him a knock on the head,' suggested the student.

'Let's lie down and go to sleep,' said I, 'and you, if you want to be near the fire, don't howl, come now.'

'Did you hear?' said the soldier sternly. 'You just understand that. You think we are sorry for you and will look after you, because you threw bread at us—and sent bullets after us? You're a sour devil! Others would have . . . Phew!'

The soldier said no more but stretched himself on the ground.

The student was already lying down. I lay down too. The frightened joiner came nearer and lay huddled together looking at the fire in silence. I was on his right and could hear his teeth chatter. The student lay curled up to his left and seemed to fall asleep at once. The soldier put his arms under his head and looked up at the sky.

'What a night! Eh? What numbers of stars! How warm!' he said to me a few minutes later. 'What a sky!—a quilt, not a sky! I love this wandering life, good friend. It's cold and hungry, but very free. You have no chiefs over you—you're master of your own life. You may eat your head off—nobody dare say a word to you. It's fine! I've been famished these days, and cross—and now I am lying here looking at the sky. The stars twinkle at me, as if to say "Never mind, Lakutin, still go on in the world, and give in to no man" Yes, my heart is happy . . . And you—how are you? Eh, joiner, don't be cross with me, and don't be afraid of anything. It's nothing that we have eaten your bread—you had bread and we had none, so we ate yours. You're a ferocious man, to send bullets at us. Don't you understand

bullets can harm a man ? I was very cross with you just now, and if you had not fallen down, I would have thrashed you, brother, for your insolence. As for the bread, you will get as far as Perekop to-morrow and can buy some there—you have money I know. Is it long since you caught the fever ?

For a considerable time the bass voice of the soldier and the trembling voice of the sick joiner rang in my ears. The night—dark, almost black—sank always lower and lower on the earth, and fresh, sweet air poured into my breast.

The fire cast a steady light and a quickening heat around. My eyes closed.

‘Get up, quick, come along !’

I woke with a frightened start, opened my eyes, and jumped up quickly, the soldier helping me on my legs and pulling me violently by the arm.

‘Now, quick, step out !’

His face was stern and alarmed. I looked round. The sun was rising and already a rose-coloured ray fell on the fixed grey face of the joiner. His mouth was open, his eyes stood out of their sockets and stared with a glazed look expressive of terror. The clothes were torn off his chest, and he lay in an unnatural, contorted position. The student was nowhere to be seen.

‘Well, haven’t you seen enough ? Come along, I tell you,’ insisted the soldier, trying to draw me away by pulling my arm.

‘Is he dead ?’ I asked, shivering in the morning freshness.

‘Of course he is ! If you were stifled you would be dead too,’ the soldier explained.

‘He ? The student ?’ I cried.

‘Well, and who else ? Was it you ? Or I perhaps ? Yes. So much for the learned. He has finished with the man cleverly and left his own comrades in the lurch. If I had known I’d have killed that student yesterday, killed him with one blow. Bang with the



fist in the temple—and there'd have been one less villain in the world. You understand what he's done? Now we must go on, so that not a single human eye shall see us in the steppes. Understand? Because to-day the joiner will be found strangled and robbed. And they will search for the likes of us. "Where do you come from? Where did you spend the night?" Well, and if they catch us? Even though you and I have nothing . . . and his revolver is in my breast pocket. That's the difficulty!

'Throw it away,' I advised the soldier.

'Throw it away?' said he reflecting. 'It's a valuable thing. And perhaps they won't catch us just yet. No, I won't throw it away. . . . Who knows that the joiner had arms on him? I won't throw it away. It's worth about three roubles. There's a bullet in it. Ah, me! What would I not give to fire this very bullet into our dear comrade's ear. How much money has the dog carried off? Eh? Anathema!'

'So much for the joiner's daughters!' said I.

'Daughters? What daughters? Ah, his daughters. Well, they'll grow up; they won't marry us. There's no talk about them. Let's be off, brother, quickly.—Which way are we to go?'

'I don't know, it's all the same.'

'I don't know either, and I know it's all the same. Let's go to the right. The sea must be there.'

We went to the right.

I looked back. Far away in the steppes rose a dark mound, and above it shone the sun.

'You're looking to see if he is risen. No fear, he won't get up and follow us. The student's a skilful lad, you see he's settled him thoroughly. What a comrade! He's done for us well. Alas, brother, people get worse from year to year; they are always getting worse,' said the soldier in a sad voice.

The steppes, silent and deserted, flooded with the morning sun, stretched all round us, melting on the horizon into the sky with such a clear, such a caressing,

generous light, that every black and unjust deed appeared impossible in the midst of this immense simplicity, this open plain covered over by the blue dome of the sky.

'I could devour anything, brother,' said my companion, making himself a cigarette

'What shall we eat to-day? and where? and how?'

A puzzle.

At this point my neighbour in the hospital ward finished his tale, saying:

'That's all. I got very friendly with this soldier and we went together to the Kars district. He was kind and a man of experience, a typical bare-footed tramp. I respected him. We went on together to Asia Minor, and then we lost sight of each other.'

'Do you remember the joiner sometimes?' asked I.

'As you see—or rather as you have heard.'

'And—feel nothing?'

He laughed.

'What ought I to feel about it? I am not to blame for what happened to him, as you are not to blame for what happened to me. And nobody is to blame for anything, for we are all alike—beasts.'

## THE KHAN AND HIS SON

THERE lived once in the Crimea a Khan, Mosolayma-el-Asrab, and he had a son called Tolayk-Algalla.

With these words the blind Tartar beggar, seated with his back against the bright brown stem of an arbutus, began to relate one of those old legends of the peninsula, so rich in memories of the past. Round the story-teller a group of 'Tartars in bright-coloured *khalats* and gold-embroidered caps were seated on fragments of stone that time had detached from the palace of some ancient Khan. It was evening, and the sun was slowly sinking into the sea; its red rays



pierced the masses of dark green foliage surrounding the ruins and fell in bright spots on the moss-grown stones and the trails of clinging green ivy. The wind sang in the branches of the old plane-trees and their leaves rustled as if invisible streams of water were flowing through the air. The blind beggar's voice was weak and shaky, and his stony face expressed nothing in its wrinkles but repose. The words he knew by heart flowed one after the other and presented to his hearers a picture of the past days, rich in strength of feeling.

The Khan was old (said the blind man), but he had many women in his harem. They loved the old man because he still had his meed of strength and fire and his caresses were tender and burning, and women will always love him who can caress with strength, even if he is grey, even if his face is wrinkled. Beauty lies in strength, and not in a soft skin and rosy cheeks.

They all loved the Khan, but he himself favoured a Cossack prisoner from the Dnieper steppes and always loved her more passionately than the other women of his harem, his large harem of three hundred women of all countries. Each was as beautiful as the spring flowers, and they all lived comfortably. The Khan ordered many sweet and tasty viands for them, and suffered them to dance and play when they liked.

He often called his Cossack girl to him in the tower, where you could see the sea, and where he had prepared for her all that a woman can need to make her life joyful: sweetmeats and all sorts of rich fabrics, gold and stones of many colours, music and rare birds from distant lands, and the burning caresses of the enamoured Khan. In this tower he amused himself with her for whole days, resting from the toil of his life in the knowledge that his son Algalla would not lower the renown of the Khanate when like a wolf he raided the Russian steppes, whence he always returned with rich spoils, with new women, with new glory, leaving behind him terror and ashes, corpses and blood.

Once Algalla returned from a raid into Russia and great festivities were held in his honour. All the *mirzas* of the peninsula came to them; there were games and feastings, and they shot arrows from their bows into the eyes of the prisoners, trying who had the greatest strength in the arm; and again they drank and extolled the bravery of Algalla, the terror of his enemies, the support of the Khanate. The old Khan was much pleased at his son's glory. It was good for him, an old man, to know that when he died, the Khanate would be in strong hands.

It was good for him to know this, and wishing to show his son the strength of his love, he spoke to him before all the *mirzas* and *beks* who were there at the feast. Holding his goblet in his hand he said: 'My own dear son, Algalla! Glory to Allah! and glory be to the name of his prophet.'

They all sang in a chorus of powerful voices a hymn to the glory of the name of the prophet, and then the Khan said: 'Allah is great! Even in my lifetime he has renewed my youth in my brave son; I see with my old eyes that when the sun will be shut off from them, and when the worms will gnaw at my heart, I shall live again in my son. Allah is great and Mahomet is his true prophet! I have a good son; his arm is strong, his heart is brave, his mind is clear. What do you wish your father's hands to give you, Algalla? Speak and I will give you all that you desire.'

The old Khan's voice had hardly died away when Tolayk-Algalla rose with flashing eyes, black as the sea at night and burning as the eyes of a mountain eagle.

'O monarch and father,' he said, 'give me the Russian prisoner.'

The Khan was silent, silent only as long as was necessary to quell the shudder in his heart, and after his silence he said in a loud, firm voice: 'Take her! When the feast is over you may take her . . .'

The daring Algalla flushed with delight, his eagle



eyes sparkled with great joy; he stood up to his full height, and said to the Khan his father: 'I know what you give me, sovereign and father—I know it. I am your slave—your son. Take my blood, a drop each hour—twenty deaths will I die for you!'

'I want nothing,' said the Khan, and his grey head, crowned with the glory of long years and many great deeds, sank on his breast.

Soon the feast was over, and they both went out of the palace to the harem, walking side by side in silence.

The night was dark; neither the moon nor the stars could be seen, and clouds covered the sky like a thick curtain.

For a long time they went on in silence, and at last Khan-el-Asrab spoke:

'Day by day my life is ebbing—my old heart beats ever slower and slower, there is always less fire in my breast. The light and warmth of my life were that Cossack girl's ardent caresses. Tell me, Tolayk, tell me—is she really necessary for you? Take a hundred of my wives—take them all, instead of her.'

Tolayk-Algalla sighed and was silent.

'How many days have I left me? I have few days more on the earth. She is the last joy of my life—this Russian girl. She knows me, she loves me; who will love me when she is not there—me, an old man? Who? Not one of them all, not one, Algalla!'

Algalla was silent.

'How shall I live knowing that you are embracing her, that she is kissing you? For a woman we are not father and son, Tolayk; for a woman we are all men, my son! It were better if all the old wounds on my body had opened, Tolayk, that my blood had flowed out—it were better if I did not survive this night, my son!'

His son remained silent. They stopped at the door of the harem, and silently, their heads sunk on their breasts, they stood long before it. Darkness was around them, clouds chased across the sky, the wind shook the trees and seemed to be singing to them.

'Father, I have long loved her,' said Algalla quietly.

'I know it, and I know that she does not love you,' said the Khan.

'My heart is torn when I think of her!'

'What is my old heart full of now?'

And again they were silent. Algalla sighed.

'I see what the wise mollah told me is true. Woman is always harmful to man. If she is beautiful, she arouses in others the desire to possess her, and her husband is given over to the pangs of jealousy. If she is ugly, her husband is envious of others, and suffers from envy. If she is neither pretty nor ugly, the man imagines she is beautiful, and understanding that he has made a mistake again suffers through her—through a woman.'

'Wisdom is no medicine for the pains of the heart,' said the Khan.

'Father, we must pity each other.'

The Khan raised his head and looked sorrowfully at his son.

'Let us kill her,' said Tolayk.

The Khan thought a moment; then he quietly murmured: 'You love yourself better than her and me.'

'Yes, and you too.'

Again they were silent.

'Yes, and I too,' said the Khan sadly. Grief had made him a child.

'Well, shall we kill her?'

'I cannot give her to you, I cannot!' said the Khan.

'And I can suffer no longer; tear out my heart, or give her to me.'

The Khan was silent.

'Or let us throw her into the sea from the cliffs.'

'Let us throw her into the sea from the cliffs,' the Khan repeated the words like an echo of his son's voice.

Then they went into the harem, where already she was asleep on the floor on her sumptuous carpet.



They stopped before her and looked—they looked long at her. Tears flowed from the old Khan's eyes and ran down his silver beard, where they shone like pearls, and his son stood there with flashing eyes, grinding his teeth to suppress his passion as he aroused the Cossack girl. She awoke: from her face, rosy and delicate as the dawn, her eyes opened out like cornflowers. She did not see Algalla, and stretched out her red lips to the Khan.

'Kiss me, my eagle!'

'Get up—you must come with us,' the Khan said gently.

Then she saw Algalla, and the tears in her eagle's eyes; she was quick to perceive, and so understood all.

'I will come,' she said, 'I will come. Neither for the one nor for the other?—is that how you have decided? Strong hearts had to decide thus! I will come.'

Then all three went towards the sea in silence. They went by narrow paths, and the wind howled loudly.

The girl was frail, and soon became tired, but she was proud and did not want to tell them.

When the Khan's son noticed that she was staying behind them, he said to her, 'Are you afraid?'

Her eyes sparkled at him and she showed him her bleeding feet.

'Let me carry you,' said Algalla, holding out his arms to her. But she put her arms round the neck of her old eagle. The Khan lifted her up like a feather and carried her, while she, resting in his arms, bent the branches away from his face for fear they might hurt his eyes. Long they walked on, and at last they heard the sound of the sea in the distance. Then Tolayk, who was following them along the footpath, said to his father, 'Let me go in front, or I shall desire to stab you in the neck with my dagger.'

'Pass on. Allah will fulfil your desire or forgive it—His will be done. I, your father, forgive you. I know what it is to love.'

At last the sea lay before them. There, far below them was space, black and boundless. Dully the waves sang at the foot of the rocks ; it was dark down there, and cold, and terrible.

'Farewell,' said the Khan, kissing the girl.

'Farewell,' said Algalla, bowing to her.

She looked down where the waves were singing and shrank back, pressing her hands to her breast.

'Throw me down !' she said to them.

Algalla stretched out his arms to her and groaned, but the Khan took her in his arms, pressed her tightly to his breast, and kissed her ; then, lifting her above his head, he threw her over the cliff.

Below the waves dashed and sang ; so loud were they that neither of them heard when she reached the water, not a cry nor a sound did they hear. The Khan sank on the rocks and silently looked down into the darkness and distance, where the sea was merged in the clouds, whence swept the dull sound of the splashing waves and the wind came flying past and blew about his grey beard. Tolayk stood by him, hiding his face in his hands, motionless and speechless as a stone. Time passed and the clouds sped over the sky one after another, chased by the wind. Dark and heavy they were, like the thoughts of the old Khan who lay above the sea at the top of the high cliffs.

'Father, let us go,' said Tolayk.

'Wait,' whispered the Khan, as if listening. Again time sped by, the waves splashed below, and the wind flew over the rocks and howled in the trees.

'Father, let us go.'

'Wait a little longer.'

Many times did Tolayk-Algalia say : 'Father, let us go.' But the Khan would not move from the place where he had lost the joy of his remaining days.

But everything has an end ! At last he rose, vigorous and proud ; he rose, frowned, and said in a hollow voice, 'Let us go.'

They went, but soon the Khan stopped.

'But why am I going, Tolayk, and where ?' he



asked his son. 'Why should I live now, when all my life was in her? I am old, no one will love me again, and if nobody loves you it is senseless to live in the world.'

'You have glory and riches, father.'

'Give me one of her kisses, and you may have all those as a reward. They are dead, it is only the love of woman that lives. If he has not that love, man has not life—he is a beggar and his days are pitiable. Farewell, my son; may Allah's blessing rest on your head, and remain with you for all the days and nights of your life!' And the Khan turned his face to the sea.

'Father,' cried Tolayk, 'father!'—and he could say no more, for you can say nothing to a man on whom death smiles, you can say nothing which would restore the love of life to his soul.

'Let me go . . .'

'Allah . . .'

'He knows . . .'

With rapid steps the Khan went to the edge of the cliff and threw himself down. His son did not prevent him—he could not, for there was not time. Again nothing was heard from the sea, not a cry, not the noise of the Khan's fall. Only the waves splashed below and the wind droned wild songs.

Long did Tolayk-Algalla look down the cliff; at last he said aloud: 'Give me too such a strong heart, O Allah!'

Then he went into the darkness of night. . . .

Thus perished Khan Mosolayma-el-Asrab, and Khan Tolayk-Algalla reigned in the Crimea.

# ALEXANDER KUPRIN

1870-1938

## TEMPTATION

THERE now, you always say 'It's chance, it's chance, . . . ' but the real point is that every trifling case may be considered more gravely than that.

Allow me to observe that I am now sixty years old, at exactly the time of life when a man, after all his wanderings, passions and struggles, has three roads left open to him: greed, ambition, and philosophy. One might even say two. Ambition, however you look at it, is but greed to accumulate and extend earthly or heavenly possibilities.

Of course, I dare not call myself a philosopher; it is altogether too cumbersome—and somehow does not suit me. Besides, you can always pull me up by asking: 'Show me your baggage, your credentials.' Nevertheless I have lived a remarkably wide and varied life; I have known wealth and poverty, sickness, war, the loss of those nearest to me, imprisonment, love and degradation, faith and incredulity. And—you may believe me or not—I have even known people. You think this is not very wonderful? It is wonderful, sir. In order to know and understand another man you must first of all be able quite to forget your own personality; forget what a seductive impression you produce on those around, and how magnificent you are on the bosom of nature. Few people know how to do this, I can assure you.

And now, in my waning days, I, poor sinner, love to reflect on life. Besides, I am now solitary and old;



my nights—do you know how long an old man's nights are? My heart and memory have vividly retained thousands of events of my own past life and of the lives of others. It is one thing to chew the cud of memory as a cow chews nettles and quite another to reflect on past events wisely and with understanding. That is what I call philosophy.

We have touched on the question of chance and destiny. I am quite ready to agree with you that chance is absurd, capricious, blind, aimless, simply stupid. But there is—I am firmly convinced of it—an immutable law that dominates life—I mean the millions of events that are linked together. Everything passes away and comes again, is born from little, from nothing, flames up, torments, rejoices, attains the summit, falls down, and comes again, and again, and again, like a spiral winding round the flight of time. This spiral making in its turn coils through numberless years returns back again, passes over the same place, and makes new coils—a spiral of spirals, and so on without end.

You will of course answer that if this law did really exist, people would have discovered it long ago and would be able to read the future as from a chart. No, it is not like that. We men, do you know, are like weavers who are seated close to endlessly long and endlessly broad warps. We have various colours before our eyes, flowers, sky-blue, purple, green, and all this runs on, runs on, and disappears—but the pattern, because it is so near, we are unable to distinguish. It is only people who stand above life, over us, the scientists of genius, the prophets, the dreamers, the fanatics, the imbeciles, and the poets to whose sharp and inspired sight it is sometimes given, amid the bustle of life, to catch a glimpse of the beginning of the harmonious pattern and to foretell the end.

You consider that I use pompous expressions, don't you? Wait a moment; it will be more intricate still further on—of course if it does not bore

you. . . . But what is one to do in a railway carriage but talk ?

I am quite ready to accept the laws that regulate with equal wisdom the movements of the stars and the digestion of a black-beetle. I believe in them and bless them ; but there is Someone or Something that is stronger than destiny and the universe. If it is Something, I would call it the law of logical absurdity, or absurd logic, whichever you please—I don't know how to express it. But if it is Someone, then He is a spirit beside whom our biblical Devil and romantic Satan seem petty jesters and even benignant swindlers.

Imagine a power governing the universe, an almost Godlike power, and beside it a boyish, desperate mischievousness ignoring good and evil but always unmercifully cruel, witty, and yet (devil take it !) somehow strangely just. Perhaps you do not quite understand me. Then allow me to illustrate my meaning.

Let us take Napoleon : a fabulous life, an incredibly great personality, an inexhaustible power—and look at the end : a tiny island, a disease of the bladder, complaints about food and doctors, the grumblings of an old man in solitude. Of course that miserable end was only the irony, only the wry smile, of my mysterious Someone. Still if you look properly into this tragic biography, casting away the explanations of the learned (they explain everything simply and by rule)—I do not know how it appears to you, but I clearly see in it absurdity and logic in agreement, though I cannot explain it.

General Skobelev again : a great, a fine figure, desperate bravery, an exaggerated faith in his own destiny. A constant jeering at death, bravado for effect under deadly fire, a perpetual yearning for risks, a sort of unsatisfied thirst for danger—and then, death on a public bed, in a disorderly room of a restaurant, in the presence of a prostitute. I repeat again, it is absurd, cruel, but in some strange way logical. It is as if these two miserable deaths had



by contrast rounded off, shaded in, completed the pictures of two magnificent existences.

The ancients knew this mysterious Someone, and were afraid of him (do you remember the ring of Polycrates?), but they mistakenly took his jokes for the jealousy of destiny.

I assure you—that is to say, I do not assure you, but I myself am deeply convinced—that at some future time, in perhaps thirty thousand years, life on our earth will become wonderfully beautiful. There will be palaces, gardens, fountains. . . . Slavery, private property, lies, violence, will cease to weigh down mankind. There will be an end to sickness, deformity, death. . . . There will be no more envy, no more vice, no more near ones, no more distant ones—all will be brothers. And it is then that He (please notice that even in conversation I name Him with a capital letter!), flying one day through the universe, will look with a cunning wink at the earth, will smile and breathe on it, and the good old earth will cease to exist. It will be a pity for the beautiful planet, won't it? But only think to what a terrible, bloody, orgiastic end this general virtuousness would have led when men had had time to become surfeited with it.

But why take such grandiose examples as our earth, or Napoleon, or the ancient Greeks? I myself have occasionally caught sight of manifestations of this terrible inscrutable law under the most ordinary circumstances. If you like, I will tell you of an occurrence in which I plainly felt the mocking breath of this God.

This is what happened. I was travelling in an ordinary first-class carriage from Tomsk. Among other passengers in the same compartment there was a young railway engineer, a fine young fellow, stout and good-natured. He had an ordinary, round, well-washed Russian face, with fair hair cropped short like a hedgehog through which his pink rosy skin showed itself; he was a regular, kindly, good-natured

little pig. His eyes, too, were of a dim blue colour like a sucking pig's.

He proved himself a most agreeable travelling companion. I have seldom seen a more obliging person. He at once gave me the lower berth, he assisted me to lift my portmanteau on to the rack, and was so amiable in every way that he made me feel a little uncomfortable. At the stations he provided himself with provisions and wine and treated the other passengers with the greatest cordiality.

I noticed at once that in him some great inner happiness was boiling and struggling to the surface, and that he wanted to see all the people around him equally happy.

And so it proved. In about ten minutes he began to disburden his soul to me. It is true I noticed that at his first outpourings the neighbours moved uneasily in their places and began to devote their attention to the country we were passing through with quite an exaggerated interest. Afterwards I learned that they had heard this story at least ten times each. I did not escape their fate.

This engineer was travelling home from the Far East, where he had spent five years, and all that time had not seen his family, for they had remained in Petersburg. He had really expected to stay there only one year, but first the government work for which he had been sent out detained him longer, and afterwards a lucrative private undertaking presented itself. Then he found that he could not leave the business, which had grown exceedingly large and profitable. Now having liquidated all his affairs he was returning home. How, under such circumstances, could you blame him for his talkativeness? he had lived for five years far away from his beloved family and was now returning home, young, healthy, very successful, and with unspent stores of love. What man could have forced himself to silence, could have quelled that terrible itch of impatience which increased



with every hour, with every hundredth part of a *verst* we traversed?

I had soon heard all his family secrets. His wife was called Susannah or 'Sannochka,' and his daughter had the strange name of Yurochka. He had left her a child of three. 'I can imagine,' he cried, 'she is now quite a young lady, almost marriageable!' I also heard his wife's maiden name, and all the difficulties they had gone through together when they were first married and he was still a student in his last year and had not even two pairs of trousers, and what a splendid companion, nurse, mother, and sister his wife had been to him at that time.

He struck himself with his fist on the breast, blushed with pride, and cried with beaming eyes: 'If you only knew her! A beauty! If you come to Petersburg, I will introduce you. You must certainly come to see us—most certainly. Without any ceremony, you know—you must not refuse—Kirochnaya 156. I will introduce you and you will get to know my old woman. A queen! At our dances—the railway engineers'—she was always the belle. Now really, if you don't come you will offend me.'

He gave each of us his visiting card, on which he had scratched out his Manchurian address and written in pencil his Petersburg one, and he informed us at the same time that this fine flat had been taken by his wife according to his instructions only the year before, when his business had rapidly improved.

Yes, his words flowed like a waterfall! About four times a day, from the large stations, he sent reply-paid telegrams to his wife, to be answered to the next big station, or simply to Train number so-and-so, to the first-class passenger so-and-so. You should have seen him when the guard came in with a telegram and called out in a sing-song, 'A telegram for the first-class passenger so-and-so!' I assure you, a bright halo appeared round his face such as the holy saints have! He rewarded the guards royally, and not only the guards; he had an irresistible temptation to



caress every one, to make every one happy, to give presents to every one. He even pressed on us as remembrances all sorts of trifles made of Siberian and Ural stones in the shape of trinkets, studs, pins, Chinese rings, jade idols, and other small knick-knacks. There were among them some that were very valuable, both for their costliness and for their rare artistic workmanship, and you must understand that it was quite impossible to escape him, notwithstanding the awkwardness of accepting such presents, so persuasively, so persistently did he plead. You could no more refuse him than you could a child who begs you to take some of its sweets.

He had with him a large number of things in the luggage van as well as in the carriage, and they all were presents for Sannochka and Yurochka. There were many beautiful toys, priceless silk-embroidered Chinese coats, ivory, gold, miniatures on sardonyx, furs, painted fans, lacquered boxes, albums; and you ought to have seen and heard with what tenderness and rapture he spoke of his near and dear ones while showing them all to us. Let us admit that his love was blind, too noisy and too egotistical, let us admit that it was even just a little hysterical; yet I can swear that under all this conventional, banal covering I could distinguish a true, great love, a sharp burning excited love.

I can also remember that at one of the stations where some cars were being coupled on, the pointsman had his foot cut off. All the passengers—the most idle, savage, and cruel public in the world—immediately got out to stare at the blood. The engineer did not remain with the rest of the crowd but quietly went up to the station-master, said a few words to him, and handed him some money that he took out of his pocket-book; it could not have been a small sum, as the other's red cap was raised very respectfully. He did this very quickly; perhaps I was the only one who saw it, but then I have a very sharp eye for such things. However, I also noticed that profiting



by the delay of the train he had time to run into the telegraph office.

I remember as clearly as if it had only been yesterday how he walked up and down the platform, his white engineer's cap shoved to the back of his head, in a long, loose, fine Chi-chun-cha Russian shirt, buttoned at the side, a field-glass hanging from a strap over one shoulder, and crossing this from the other a strap with a small bag; he came along from the telegraph office, looking for all the world like a fresh, strong, fleshy, rosy, well-fed, simple village lad.

At every larger station there was a telegram for him. He had spoiled the guards so that they now of their own accord ran to the telegraph office to ask if there were not a telegram for him. Poor boy! he was unable to conceal his delight, and read his telegrams aloud to us, just as if we could have no other cares than for his family happiness. 'Keep well, we send kisses, all impatience, Sannochka, Yurochka,' or 'Watch in hand follow your journey by time-table, station to station are with you in heart and thoughts,'—and they were all in this style. Why, there was even a telegram worded something like this: 'Set your watch by Petersburg time exactly at eleven o'clock, look at the star Alpha of the Great Bear, I will do so too!'

There was one passenger in our carriage, the owner, bookkeeper, or manager of some gold mine, a real Siberian with a face like the portraits of Moses Murin—a dry, long face, thick, black, fierce eye-brows, a very thick, long, grizzly beard—a man who you could see had been very much tried by the experiences of life. He cautiously observed to the engineer:

'Young man, you ought not to misuse the telegraph in that way.'

'What do you mean? How do I misuse it?'

'Why, in this way: you should not keep your little lady in such an excited, highly strung state. You ought to consider other people's nerves.'

But he only laughed and slapped the wise man on

the knee. 'Ah, old man, I know you, you old-fashioned people! You start on a journey secretly, you try to arrive unexpectedly, asking yourself, "Is all in order round my domestic hearth?" Eh?'

But the man with a face like an *icon* only moved his eyebrows and smiled. 'Well, well, what of that? That, too, is not amiss sometimes!'

From Nizhni there were other passengers in our compartment; from Moscow others again. My engineer's excitement grew greater and greater — what was to be done with him? He had a way of quickly making acquaintance with every one. With the married men he talked of the sacredness of the domestic hearth, the unmarried he reproached with the slovenliness and wastefulness of a bachelor's life; with the young girls he talked of single and everlasting love, with the married ladies he conversed about children. Whatever the conversation was it always led up to his Sannochka and Yurochka. I can still remember how his daughter had said: 'I have 'ellow 'oes,' 'opposite us is de 'poticary shop!' and another conversation when she was squeezing the cat, and the cat mewed, and her mother said, 'Leave the cat alone, Yurochka, you are hurting it,' and she answered, 'No, mama, it is pleasure for cat!' And also, how she once saw some red balloons in the street and said to her mother, 'Mama, how rapturous they are!'

All this seemed to me tender and touching, but also, I must confess, rather tiresome.

It was morning when we approached Petersburg. The day was dull, rainy, cheerless. A fog, not exactly a fog but a sort of dirty mist, enveloped the rusty and stunted pines and the damp hillocks, that looked like ragged warts, stretching to right and left of the railway. I got up early so as to have time for a wash, and came upon the engineer in the corridor. He was standing at a window, first looking out and then looking at his watch.

'Good morning,' I said: 'what are you doing here?'



'Oh, good morning, how are you? I am just reckoning the speed of the train—we are now going at a rate of sixty *vershs* an hour.'

'Are you reckoning by your watch?'

'Yes, it's quite simple. From post to post is twenty-five *sazhen*, the twentieth part of a *verst*. Therefore, if we do these twenty-five *sazhen* in four seconds, the rate per hour would be forty-five *vershs*, if in three sixty *vershs*, in two ninety. You can even find out the rate of speed without a watch—you must know how to count the seconds; you must count as fast as you can but clearly to six, thus: one, two, three, four, five, six—one, two, three, four, five, six; this is the method of the Austrian General Staff.'

That is how he talked, restlessly looking around, and constantly changing his position, but of course I knew very well that all this method of the Austrian General Staff was only meant as a blind, and that the engineer was only trying to cheat his impatience.

When we got to Lyuban it became pitiful to look at him. He grew pale, thin, and old before my eyes. He even stopped talking. He pretended to be reading a newspaper, but you could plainly see that this occupation was distasteful and unpleasant to him; sometimes he even held the newspaper upside down. He would sit still for about five minutes, then again run to the window in the corridor, then again sit down and move about in his place as if he wanted to push the train along faster, then again return to the window in the corridor and again reckon the speed by his watch, turning his head from side to side. Ah, how well I know—yes, and who does not know?—that days and weeks of waiting are nothing compared with these last half hours, with this last quarter of an hour!

At last we reached the semaphore, the endless maze of cross rails, then the long wooden platform, the bearded porters in white aprons. . . . The engineer put on his uniform overcoat, took his hand-bag, and went on to the small platform in front. I was looking

out of one of the windows of the corridor so as to hail a porter as soon as the train stopped. From my window I could distinctly see the engineer; he was looking out of the open door that led to the steps. He saw me and nodded and smiled, but I had time to notice that he was astonishingly, unnaturally pale at that moment.

A tall lady in a sort of silver-coloured jacket and large velvet hat with a blue veil flashed past our car; she had with her a little, long-legged girl in a short frock and white gaiters. Both of them followed the train, looking with anxious eyes into each window as it passed. But they missed him. I heard the engineer call out in a strange, dull, trembling voice: 'Sannochka!'

I think they both turned round. Then suddenly a short, terrible cry of agony. . . . I shall never forget it. . . . It was a cry unlike any other, of perplexity, horror, pain, and lamentation.

For a second I saw the engineer's head, without a cap, somewhere between the bottom of the carriage and the platform. I did not see his face, only the pink crown of his head with its short-cropped hair; the head only appeared for a second and then I saw nothing more.

Afterwards I was questioned as a witness. I remember how I tried to calm his wife, but what can one say in such circumstances? I saw him too, a flattened, distorted piece of raw flesh. He had already ceased to breathe when they took him out from under the carriage. It was reported that at first his leg had been cut off, but he had instinctively tried to recover himself and turned, and the wheel had passed over his chest and stomach.

Now I come to the most awful part of what I am relating to you. In these terrible, never to be forgotten minutes a strange consciousness never left me for a moment. 'A stupid death,' I thought; 'an absurd death, a cruel, an unjust death,' but somehow from the very first moment, immediately after his cry, it



became clear to me that just this must inevitably have happened, that this absurdity was logical and natural. Why was it so? Explain that to me? Was it not my devil's smile of indifference that was felt?

His widow (I afterwards went to see her, and she asked me many questions about him) said plainly they had both tempted fate with their impatient love, their certainty of meeting, their certainty of the morrow. What then? Perhaps, but I can be sure of nothing. . . . In the East (and surely it is there we find the true spring of ancient wisdom) a man never says what he intends doing at once, or to-morrow, without adding, '*Inch Allah!*' which means 'God willing,' or 'Thy will be done.'

However, it seems to me, that here it was not a temptation of fate, but only the same absurd logic of the mysterious God. Surely greater joy than their mutual expectations when, conquering space, they were united, though separated, greater happiness these two people could certainly never have experienced. God only knows what awaited them on the morrow. Disenchantment? Weariness? Indifference? Perhaps even hatred?

# LEONID NIKOLAEVICH ANDREE

1871-1919

## THE LIE

### I

'You are lying! I know you are lying!'

'Why are you shouting? Is it necessary for every one to hear us?'

Again she lied. I was not shouting, but speaking quite quietly and gently; I held her hand and spoke quietly and gently, and this venomous word 'lie' hissed like a little snake.

'I love you,' she continued, 'and you must believe me. Does not this convince you?' and she kissed me. But when I wanted to press her in my arms, she was no longer there. She went out of the dark passage and I followed her into the room where the gay fête was drawing to an end. How do I know where it was? She had told me to come there and I had come, and seen couples wheeling round and round all night. Nobody came up to me or spoke to me: a stranger to all, I sat in a corner near the musicians. The mouth of a large brass trumpet was directed straight towards me, and there was somebody imprisoned there roaring and every other minute laughing jerkily and coarsely: 'Ho, ho, ho!'

From time to time a white, scented cloud approached me. It was she. I do not know how she managed to caress me unperceived by others, but for one short second her shoulder pressed against my shoulder, for one short second lowering my eyes I could see



a white neck and a low-cut white frock. When I raised my eyes I saw the profile of a white, severe, placid face, like the face of a pensive angel over the graves of forgotten men. I saw her eyes. They were large, greedy for light, lovely, calm. Surrounded by its blue circle the pupils shone darkly, and whenever I looked in them they were always the same, black, deep, and unfathomable. Perhaps I looked in them too short a time for my heart to beat once, but I never felt so deeply and fearfully the meaning of infinity and never knew its power so forcibly. With fear and pain I felt that my whole life, like a tiny ray of light, was swallowed up by her eyes, until I became a stranger to myself, empty and voiceless—almost dead. Then she went away from me, taking my whole life with her, and again danced with some tall, arrogant, handsome man. I studied every detail of his person, the shape of his shoes, the width of his raised shoulders, the regular wave of an unruly lock of hair, and he seemed to press me to the wall with his indifferent unseeing glance, and I became as flat and insignificant to the eye as the wall itself.

When the candles began to go out I went up to her and said, 'It is time to be going, I will take you home.'

She was surprised. 'But I am going with him,' and she pointed to the tall and handsome stranger, who did not even look at us. Taking me into an empty room she kissed me.

'You lie,' said I, quietly, gently.

'We shall meet to-day. You must come,' she answered.

As I drove home the green frosty morning peeped over the high roofs. In all the whole street we two were alone, my *izvozchik* and I. He sat huddled up, hiding his face from the wind, and I behind him also huddled up in my coat and covering up my face to the eyes. The *izvozchik* had his thoughts and I had mine; there behind the thick walls thousands of people were sleeping, and they too had their dreams and their thoughts. I thought of her and how she

had lied ; I thought of death, and it appeared to me that these walls, lit up by the morning twilight, already saw me dead, and that was why they were so cold and straight. I do not know what the *izvozchik* was thinking, I do not know what those hidden behind the walls were dreaming. But neither did they know what I was thinking, what I was dreaming.

So we drove through the long, straight streets while morning arose over the roofs and everything around us was white and immovable. A sweet-scented white cloud approached me, and right into my ear some one imprisoned laughed : 'Ho, ho, ho !'

## II

She had lied. She did not come, and I waited for her in vain. A grey, cold, congealed half-darkness settled down from the gloomy sky and I did not know when the twilight changed into evening or when evening passed into night ; I thought of it all as one long night. Always with the same steps, the same regular, monotonous steps of waiting, I passed backwards and forwards. I did not go any nearer to the high house where my love dwelt nor to the glass front-door, which looked yellow in the shade of its iron roof, but always with the same regular steps I paced up and down the other side of the street—backwards and forwards—backwards and forwards. Going towards it I never took my eyes off the glass door, and going away from it I often stopped and turned my head, and then the snow pricked my face with its sharp needles. They were so long, those cold, sharp needles, that they penetrated into my heart and pierced it with the weary longing and irritation of helpless waiting. From the light north to the dark south the cold wind hurried, whistled, played over the frozen roofs, and tearing itself free from them whipped my face with small, sharp snowflakes and rattled like sand on the glass of the empty street lamps, where the solitary yellow flame



shivered with cold and bent before it. I was sorry for the solitary flame that lived only by night, and I thought that soon all life would cease in this street, that I should go away, and only the snowflakes would hurry across the empty space and the yellow flame continue to shiver and bend in the solitude and cold.

I waited for her, and she did not come. It appeared to me that the solitary flame and I were alike, only my lamp was not empty. People appeared from time to time in the space that I measured with my footsteps. Silently they grew up behind me, large and dark, passed by me, and like grey phantoms suddenly disappeared round the corner of a white building. Then again from round the corner they came up to me and slowly melted away into the grey distance that was full of the silent moving snow. Wrapt up in their greatcoats, formless and silent, they were all alike and like me, and I thought that many dozen people were walking backwards and forwards as I was—waiting, shivering in silence, as I was, and thinking their own enigmatic, melancholy thoughts.

I waited for her, and she did not come. I do not know why I did not cry out and weep with pain—I do not know why I laughed and was happy. I clenched my fingers together as if they were claws, and seemed to grasp tightly between them the little venomous creature—the snake—the lie. She coiled round my arms and bit at my heart, and I grew giddy with her poison. Everything around was lies. The boundary disappeared between the future and the present, between the present and the past. The boundary disappeared between the time when I was not yet alive and the time when I began to live, and I thought that I had always been alive, or never, and always, before I lived and when I began to live, she was reigning over me. It was strange to me to think that she had a name and a body, that in her existence there was a beginning and an end. She had no name, but she was always the one who lied, and who always made you wait for her and never came. I don't know



why it was, but I laughed, and the sharp needles plunged into my heart and some one imprisoned laughed in my ear: 'Ho, ho, ho!'

Opening my eyes I saw the lighted windows of the tall house and they spoke to me quietly with their blue and red tongues.

'She is deceiving you at this moment. While you are wandering about waiting for her and suffering, she, the all-beautiful, all-bright, all-deceitful, is here listening to the whispers of the tall and handsome man who despises you. If you rushed in and killed her you would do a good deed, because you would kill the lie.'

I clenched more closely the hand in which I held a knife; laughing, I answered: 'Yes, I will kill her!'

But the windows looked sadly at me and added sadly, 'You will never kill her, never, because the instrument in your hand is as much a lie as are her kisses!'

All the waiting, silent shadows had long disappeared, and in that cold spot I alone remained—I and the solitary tongues of flame that shivered with cold and despair. Not far from me in the church belfry the clock began to strike the hour, and its dejected, metallic sound quavered and sobbed, flying out into space and losing itself in the madly whirling snowflakes. I began to count the strokes and laughed: the clock struck fifteen. The belfry was old, and the clock too, and although it went well it struck anyhow, often so many times that the old bell-ringer had to go up the belfry to stop with his hands the spasmodic striking tongue. For whom did they lie, these quavering sad sounds that were seized and strangled by the frosty darkness? So pitiful and absurd was this unnecessary lie!

With the last lying sound of the clock the glass door banged and the same tall man came down the steps. I only saw his back but I recognised it, for only yesterday I had seen him, haughty and contemptuous. I recognised his gait, and it was lighter, more assured, than yesterday. I too had often left



the house thus : it is the way men walk who have just been kissed by the lying lips of a woman.

## III

I threatened, I demanded, I gnashed my teeth !  
'Tell me the truth !'

With a face as cold as snow, with surprise and raised eyebrows below which, always passionless and mysterious, shone black unfathomable pupils, she asked me : 'But do I lie to you ?'

She knew that I could not prove that she lied and that all the heavy, massive creation of my searching thoughts could be destroyed by one word from her—by one lying word. I waited for it, and it came from her mouth, on the surface sparkling with the colours of truth but in its depths dark : 'I love you ! Am I not entirely yours ?'

We were far from the town and the snow-covered fields looked through the dark windows. Above them was darkness, and around them darkness, thick, immovable, silent darkness, but they gleamed with their own treasured light like the face of a corpse in the gloom. A single candle lighted the large, well-heated room, and even on its red flame could be seen the pale reflection of the dead fields.

'I want to know the truth, no matter how sad it may be. Perhaps I shall die when I hear it, but to die is better than not to know the truth. I feel there is falsehood in your eyes. Tell me the truth, and I will go away from you for ever,' I said. But she was silent and the look in her eyes, the cold searching look, pierced into my innermost heart, turned out the depths of my soul, and with strange inquisitiveness examined it, and I cried : 'Answer, or I will kill you !'

'Kill me,' she answered calmly ; 'sometimes it is so wearisome to live. Can you get truth by threats ?'

Then I fell on my knees, pressed her hand, cried and besought her for pity—and the truth!

‘Poor fellow,’ she said, putting her hand on my hair, ‘poor fellow!’

‘Have pity on me,’ I implored, ‘I long for the truth!’

I looked at her smooth brow and thought that truth was there behind this thin partition. Madly I wanted to tear open her skull to see the truth. Here below the white breasts her heart was beating, and madly I wanted to tear open those breasts with my claws and see, if only for once, the naked human heart. The pointed yellow flame of the candle, fast burning away, was motionless; the dark walls stretched away in the gloom; it was so sorrowful, so lonely, so fearful.

‘Poor fellow,’ she said, ‘poor fellow!’

With spasmodic flickerings the yellow flame fell and turned blue and then went out; darkness surrounded us. I could not see her face, or her eyes; her arms clasped my head, and I felt the lie no more. I closed my eyes—I did not think, I did not live, I merely absorbed into myself the touch of her hands, and it seemed to me truthful. Through the darkness faintly the sound of her whisper came—strange and fearful.

‘Embrace me. I am afraid!’

Then again silence and again the low whisper of fear.

‘You want the truth—but do I know it? Even I, do I want to know it? Protect me—oh, how awful!’

I opened my eyes. The pale darkness of the room ran away from the tall windows, collected at the walls, and hid in the corners, and through the windows looked a thing large and deadly white. It seemed that some one’s dead eyes searched for us, as if some one encompassed us in his frozen grasp. Shivering we pressed close together, and she whispered: ‘Oh, how awful!’



## IV

I killed her.

I killed her, and when she lay a faded and flattened mass at that window, beyond which the white fields stretched out, I put my foot on her body and laughed. It was not the laugh of a madman. No! I laughed because my breast breathed evenly and lightly, because in its depth there was happiness, peace, and emptiness: from my heart had fallen the worm that had gnawed it. Bending down I looked in the dead eyes. Large eyes eager for light, they remained open, and were like the eyes of a wax doll, the same round, dim eyes that seemed to be covered with mica. I could touch them with my finger, shut and open them, and I was not afraid because the demon of lies and doubt no longer lived in those black, unfathomable pupils that so long had thirstily drunk of my blood.

When they arrested me I laughed, and those who took me away thought it dreadful and savage. They turned from me with aversion and drew back; others, strict and terrible, with reproaches on their lips, came straight towards me, but when they saw my joyful, merry look their faces grew pale and their feet were glued to the ground.

'A madman!' they said, and I thought that this word calmed them because it helped them to solve the enigma: how I, a lover, could kill my beloved and yet laugh. Only one, a fat, red-faced, jolly man, called me by another name. It hit me and darkened the light before my eyes.

'Poor man,' he said with sympathy, without bitterness, because he was fat and jolly, 'poor man!'

'Don't,' I cried, 'don't call me that!'

I don't know why I cried out at him. Of course I did not want to kill him nor even touch him, but all these frightened people who saw in me a madman and a criminal became more alarmed and cried out in such a way that I laughed again.

When they led me out of the room in which the corpse lay, I said again in a loud voice, obstinately looking at the jolly, fat man, 'I am happy, I am happy !'

And it was true.



Once in my childhood I had seen a panther in the Zoological Gardens that had struck my imagination and long occupied my thoughts. He was not like the other animals, who stupidly slept, or viciously gazed at the visitors. He walked about in a straight line from corner to corner of his cage with mathematical precision, each time turning at the same place, each time rubbing against the same bar of his cage with his golden fur. His sharp, rapacious head was bent down, his eyes looking straight before him, and not once did he turn aside. All day long people crowded before his cage; they talked and made a noise, but he continued his wandering and did not once turn his eyes towards the gazers. Few faces in the crowd smiled; most of them looked seriously, even gloomily, on this living picture of dull, despairing reflection, and turned away with a sigh; going away they would turn again inquiringly to look at him, unable to comprehend, and sigh as if there were something in common between them, free men, and this imprisoned beast. Whenever afterwards men or books mentioned eternity I thought of the panther, and it appeared to me that I knew eternity and its torments.

I became such a panther in my stone cage. I walked about and thought. I walked in one line across my cage from corner to corner, and my thoughts travelled along a short line—such heavy thoughts it seemed that I had not a head but a whole world on my shoulders. They consisted of only one word, but what a large, what a tormenting, what a fatal word !

'Lies' is this word.



Again, hissing, it crawled from all the corners and coiled around my soul, but it had ceased to be a little snake—it had grown into a large, fierce, shining serpent, and it stung me and smothered me with its iron rings. When I cried out with pain out of my open mouth came the same repulsive, whistling, serpent-like sound, as if my whole breast were swarming with reptiles: ‘Lies!’

I walked amid my thoughts, and the smooth, grey asphalt floor changed before my eyes into a grey, transparent, bottomless abyss. My feet ceased to feel the touch of the stones, and I fancied that I was floating at an immeasurable height above the mist and darkness. When my breast was delivered of the hissing sigh, from there, from the bottom, from this thin but impenetrable wrapper, slowly resounded a horrible echo—so slowly and softly, as if it traversed thousands of years and at each minute and in each atom of mist had lost part of its power. I understood that there, down at the bottom, it whistled like the wind which tears up trees, but to my ears it came like evil news brought in one short word: ‘Lies.’

This mean whisper made me indignant. I stamped my feet on the stones and shouted: ‘There are no lies! I have killed the lies!’

I purposely turned away, for I knew it would answer, and slowly from the deep bottomless abyss came the answer: ‘Lies.’

You see, the matter stands thus. I had made a miserable mistake: I had killed the woman, but had made the lie immortal. Do not kill the woman until by means of entreaty, torture, and fire you have torn the truth from her soul.

Thus I thought as I walked from corner to corner of my cage.

## VI

It is dark and dreadful where she has carried the truth and the lie—and there shall I go At the very

throne of Satan I shall catch her and fall on my knees and weeping say, 'Show me the truth!'

My God! My God! this too is a lie. Darkness is there, and the emptiness of centuries and eternity, but she is not there—she is not anywhere. The lie has remained. It is immortal. I feel it in every atom of the air, and when I breathe it comes with hisses into my breast and tears it—and tears it!

Oh! what madness it is for a man to look for truth! What pain!

Save me! save me!

## SILENCE

## I

ONE moonlight night in May, when the nightingales were singing, the wife of Father Ignatius came into his study. Her face showed signs of suffering and the small lamp she carried shook in her hand. She came up to her husband, touched him on the shoulder, and said, sobbing: 'Father, let us go to little Vera.'

Without turning his head, Father Ignatius looked at his wife over his spectacles with knitted brows; he looked long and attentively, until making a deprecatory movement with her free hand she sank down on a low sofa.

'You and she are both pitiless,' she said slowly, with a marked emphasis on the last word, and her kind, plump face was drawn by an expression of pain and exasperation which seemed to imply how cruel her husband and daughter were.

Father Ignatius smiled and got up. He closed his book, took off his spectacles, put them in their case, and stood thinking. His large, black beard streaked with silver threads lay in a graceful curve on his breast and rose and fell gently with his deep breathing.

'Well, let us go,' he said.

Olga Stepanovna got up hastily and in a coaxing,



timid voice begged him—'Only don't scold her, Father! you know what she is . . .'

Vera's room was in the attic, and the narrow wooden staircase that led to it bent and groaned under Father Ignatius's heavy tread. He was tall and weighty, and was obliged to bend his head so as not to hit the floor of the upper story, and he frowned fastidiously when his wife's white jacket flapped lightly in his face. He knew that their talk with Vera would have no result.

'What is the matter?' asked Vera, raising one of her bare arms to her eyes. The other arm lay on the white summer quilt and scarcely showed against it, it was so white and transparent and cold.

'Verochka,' began her mother, but then she sobbed and stopped.

'Vera,' said her father, trying to soften his loud, harsh voice, 'tell us, Vera, what is the matter with you?'

Vera was silent.

'Vera, have not your mother and I merited your confidence? Do we not love you? Can there be anyone nearer to you than we are? Tell us your sorrow, and believe me, an old and experienced man, it will be a relief for you and for us too. Look at your old mother, how she suffers . . .'

'Verochka!'

'And for me . . .,' his harsh voice shook, as if something had snapped in it, 'and for me, do you think it is easy? Do I not see that some sorrow is eating you up?—but what is the sorrow? I, your father, do not know what it is. Ought it to be so?'

Vera was silent.

Father Ignatius passed his hand over his beard with great care, as if he were afraid his fingers would involuntarily tear at it, and continued:

'It was contrary to my wish that you went to Petersburg—did I curse you for your disobedience?—or did I not give you money?—or will you say that I was not affectionate? Well, why are you silent? That is what your Petersburg has done!'

Father Ignatius stopped; he seemed to see before him something—a large granite mass, terrifying, full of unknown dangers and strange, indifferent people. It was there that his solitary, delicate Vera had been, and there that she had been destroyed. A malignant hatred of the terrible and incomprehensible town rose in Father Ignatius's breast, and irritation too with his daughter, who kept silent, obstinately silent.

'Petersburg has nothing to do with it,' said Vera sullenly, and closed her eyes: 'there is nothing the matter with me. You had better go to bed; it is late.'

'Verochka,' sighed her mother, 'my daughter, open your heart to me . . .'

'Oh, mother!' interrupted Vera impatiently.

Father Ignatius sat down on a chair and laughed.

'So it is all nothing!' he observed ironically.

'Father,' said Vera sharply, sitting up in her bed, 'you know that I love you and mother too, but— Well then, I'm only a bit dull. It will soon pass. Really, you had better go to bed; I want to sleep. Tomorrow, or some other day, we will talk about it.'

Father Ignatius got up so suddenly that his chair knocked against the wall. He took his wife by the hand.

'Come along.'

'Verochka!'

'Come along, I tell you,' cried Father Ignatius. 'If she has forgotten her God, what can we expect? what are we to her?'

He led Olga Stepanovna almost by force out of the room, but when they were on the stair his wife went slower and said in an angry whisper:

'Oh, oh, it is you, the priest, who have made her like this. It is from you that she has learned her ways. You will have to answer for it. Ah, how unhappy I am!'

She began to cry; her eyes blinked so that she could not see where she was going, and she stepped down as if there was an abyss at the bottom into which she wanted to fall.



From that day Father Ignatius ceased to speak to his daughter, but she seemed not to notice it. As before she either remained lying in her room, or walked about, often rubbing her eyes with the palm of her hand as if she had dust in them. The priest's wife, who loved jokes and laughter, was crushed between these two silent people; she grew timid and felt lost, not knowing what to say or do.

Sometimes Vera went out for walks. A week after the conversation she went out in the evening as usual. She was never seen alive again, for that night she threw herself under a train, and the train cut her to pieces.

Father Ignatius himself read the funeral service. His wife was not in church, as she had had a stroke on hearing of Vera's death. She had lost the use of her legs and arms and tongue, and she lay quite motionless in a half-darkened room, listening to the bells tolling in the belfry close by. She heard all the people leave the church; she heard the choristers singing in front of the house, and wanted to lift her hand to cross herself, but her arm would not obey her; she wanted to say 'Good-bye, Vera,' but her tongue lay in her mouth huge and heavy. Yet so reposeful was her position that anybody looking at her would have thought she was resting or sleeping. Only her eyes were open.

Many people came to church for the funeral—Father Ignatius's friends, and strangers too—and all were sorry for Vera, who had died such a terrible death; and all of them tried to find signs of great grief in Father Ignatius's movements or voice. They did not like Father Ignatius because his manner was rough and proud; he hated sinners and would not forgive them, but at the same time he was envious and greedy, and lost no opportunity of taking from his parishioners more than his due. They all wanted to see him suffering, broken down, acknowledging that he was himself doubly to blame for his daughter's death: as a severe father and a bad priest who was

unable to save his own child from sin. All looked inquiringly at him, and he, feeling that curious eyes were directed on his back, tried to straighten out his broad strong back, and did not think about his dead daughter, but only how he was to sustain his own dignity.

'A hardened priest,' said the joiner Karzenov, shaking his head at Father Ignatius, who had not paid him five roubles for a frame he had made.

Thus, holding himself firm and straight, Father Ignatius went to the cemetery, and thus he returned home. It was only at his wife's door that his back bent a little, but that was perhaps because most of the doors were too low for his height. Coming from the daylight it was with difficulty that he could distinguish his wife's face, and when at last he was able to examine it he was surprised that it was so calm, that there were no tears in her eyes, that there was neither anger nor sorrow in those eyes—they were dumb and silent with a heavy, obstinate silence, like her whole heavy, powerless body, which was sunk into the feather bed.

'Well, how are you feeling?' asked Father Ignatius. But the lips were dumb, the eyes were silent. Father Ignatius put his hand on her forehead; it was cold and damp, and Olga Stepanovna showed in no way that she felt his touch. When Father Ignatius removed his hand two deep grey eyes looked at him without blinking; the dilated pupils made them seem almost black, and in them he could see neither sorrow nor anger.

'Well, I will go to my room,' said Father Ignatius, who had become cold and frightened.

He went into the drawing-room, where all was clean and in order as usual. The large arm-chairs in their white covers looked like corpses in their shrouds. At one window a wire bird-cage was hanging, but it was empty and the door was open.

'Nastasia,' shouted Father Ignatius, and his voice appeared to him harsh; it seemed awkward to have



called out so loud in these quiet rooms just after his daughter's funeral. 'Nastasia,' he called less loudly, 'where is the canary?'

The cook, who had cried so much that her nose had become swollen and red as a beetroot, answered rudely, 'Where? It has flown away, of course.'

'Why did you let it out?' Father Ignatius frowned sternly.

Nastasia began to cry, and wiped her eyes with the end of the kerchief she had tied on her head, saying between her tears, 'Poor dear soul—it was the young lady's—how could we keep it?'

It appeared to Father Ignatius that the merry yellow canary, that always sang with its head on one side, was really Vera's soul, and that if it had not flown away it could not have been said that Vera was dead; and he got more cross with the cook and shouted, 'Go away!' and when Nastasia could not find the door at once he added, 'Fool!'

## II

From the day of the funeral silence fell on the little house. It was not stillness, for stillness is only the absence of sounds, but it was silence. It seemed like the silence of those who could speak but did not want to. So thought Father Ignatius when he went into his wife's room and met her obstinate gaze—such a heavy gaze that it seemed to turn the whole air into lead, and weigh down on his head and back. Thus he thought as he looked through his daughter's music, on which her voice seemed to be imprinted; at her books, or at her portrait. It was a large portrait, painted in oils, which she had brought with her from Petersburg. In examining it Father Ignatius followed a certain order: first he looked at the cheek that was lighted up in the portrait, and imagined it had a scratch which had been on Vera's dead cheek, and of which he could not understand the cause. Each time

he tried to think what the cause could have been. Had it been done by the train, the whole head would have been crushed; and the head of his dead Vera was quite uninjured. Perhaps it had been touched by some one's foot when they had lifted up the corpse, or perhaps by some one's nail?

To think long of the details of Vera's death was terrible, and Father Ignatius passed on to the eyes of the portrait. They were pretty, black eyes, with long lashes that cast a deep shade below and made the whites appear especially bright, and gave the eyes the effect of being surrounded by a black mourning frame. The unknown but talented painter had given them a strange expression. It seemed as if there were a thin, transparent film between these eyes and the object they looked upon. It was something like the black lid of a piano, on to which a thin, almost imperceptible coating of summer dust had flown, softening the brightness of the polished wood. Wherever Father Ignatius placed the portrait the eyes always followed him, but they did not speak—they were silent, and this silence was so plain that it appeared as if you could hear it. Gradually Father Ignatius began to think that he heard the silence.

Every morning after service Father Ignatius went into the drawing-room, and after casting a glance at the empty cage and all the well-known things in the room, sat down in an arm-chair, shut his eyes, and listened to the silence of the house. It was a strange thing, this silence. The cage was quietly and tenderly silent, and you could feel in this silence sorrow, and tears, and far-off, dead laughter. His wife's silence, softened by the walls, was obstinate, heavy as lead, terrible, so terrible that on the very hottest day it made Father Ignatius grow cold. Protracted, cold as the grave, and enigmatic as death was his daughter's silence. This silence seemed to cause suffering to itself—it wanted passionately to speak, but something, strong and blunt like a machine, kept it immovable and taut like a wire. And somewhere far in the



distance the wire began to vibrate and ring softly, timidly, pathetically, and Father Ignatius in fear and delight tried to catch these just awakening sounds, and supporting his hands on the arms of the chair bent his neck forward and waited for the sound to come nearer to him. But the sound suddenly stopped and died away.

'Nonsense,' said Father Ignatius angrily, and got up from his chair, still tall and straight. Through the window he could see the square paved with round, even cobbles and flooded with sunlight, and, opposite, the long wall of a barn without any windows. At the corner an *izvozchik* was standing looking like a figure of clay, and he could not understand why he was standing there, as for hours on end nobody passed that way.

### III

When not at home Father Ignatius had to speak much, with the clergy, with the parishioners, when officiating in church, and sometimes with friends when he played preference with them; but when he returned home again he thought that he had been silent all day. The reason of this was that there was nobody with whom Father Ignatius could speak about the chief and for him the most important question that occupied his thoughts every night: why Vera had died.

Father Ignatius did not want to understand that now it was impossible to find it out, and thought he would still be able to. Every night—and they were all sleepless ones now—he pictured to himself the moment when he and his wife had stood near Vera's bed in the dead of night and he had said to her: 'Tell us?' When his recollections reached these words, the rest appeared to him not as it had been. His closed eyes, which retained in the darkness an unfading picture of that night, saw how Vera sat up in

her bed, smiled, and said—but what did she say? Vera's unspoken word that was to explain all seemed to be so near that if only you strained your ears and stopped the beating of your heart you would instantly be able to hear it, and at the same time it was so illimitably, so hopelessly, far away. Father Ignatius got up and stretched out his clasped, shaking hands beseechingly: 'Vera!'

But the answer he received was silence.

One evening Father Ignatius came into Olga Stepanovna's room, where he had not been for over a week, sat down near her pillow, and turning away from her steadfast and obstinate gaze said: 'Mother! I want to talk to you about Vera. Do you hear me?'

The eyes were silent, and Father Ignatius raising his voice began to talk severely and authoritatively, as he talked to those who came to confession.

'I know that you think I was the cause of Vera's death. But consider, did I love her less than you did? You have a strange way of reasoning. I was strict, but did that prevent her from doing what she wanted? I neglected the dignity of a father. I humbly bent my neck when she did not fear my curse and went—there. . . . And you, old woman, did you not cry and beg her to stay with us, until I ordered you to be silent? Am I to blame that she was born so hard-hearted? Did I not constantly talk to her about God, about humility, about love?'

Father Ignatius looked sharply in his wife's eyes—and turned away.

'What could I do with her if she would not tell her sorrow? Command?—I commanded; entreat?—I entreated. What would you have me do? Was I to get on my knees before a little girl and cry like an old woman? In her mind—how can I know what she had in her mind! A cruel, a heartless daughter!'

Father Ignatius struck his knee with his fist.

'She had no love—that's just it! It is useless to



talk about me—I, of course, am a tyrant—but did she love you? you who cried and humbled yourself?’

Father Ignatius laughed a soundless laugh.

‘She loved you! That’s so, and to console you she chose such a death—a cruel, a shameful death! She died on the sand, in the dirt—like a dog who has been kicked in the muzzle.’

Father Ignatius’s voice sounded faint and hoarse.

‘I am ashamed—I am ashamed to go into the street, I am ashamed to go out of the altar doors! Before God I am ashamed! A cruel—an unworthy daughter! You ought to be accursed in your coffin . . .’

When Father Ignatius looked again at his wife, she was unconscious; she only came to herself after some hours. When she regained consciousness her eyes were silent, and it was impossible to know if she remembered what Father Ignatius had said to her or not.

That same night—it was a moonlight night in July, quiet, warm, and soundless—Father Ignatius went on tiptoe up the stairs, so that his wife and the sick-nurse should not hear him, and entered Vera’s room. The window of the attic had not been opened since Vera’s death, and the air was hot and dry, with a slight smell of burning caused by the iron roof that had been heated by the sun during the day. The room, from which human beings had so long been absent, seemed to breathe an air of being uninhabited and deserted, and the wooden walls, the furniture, and all the rest of its contents exhaled a faint scent of gradual decay. The moonlight fell through the window in a bright stripe on the floor, and being reflected from the carefully washed boards cast a twilight glimmer into the corners, making the clean white bed with its two pillows, one large and one small, look ghostlike and aerial. Father Ignatius opened the window and a broad stream of fresh air poured into the room, bringing with it a smell of dust, of the not distant river, and of flowering limes. It also bore with

it the faint sounds of a far-off chorus: probably some people were rowing on the river and singing. Noiselessly moving on his bare feet and looking like a white phantom Father Ignatius went to the empty bed, bent his knees, and buried his head in the pillows, embracing them where Vera's head should have been. He lay long thus; the song sounded louder and then died away, and still he lay there, his long black hair spreading out over his shoulders and over the pillows.

The moon had moved on and it was darker in the room when Father Ignatius raised his head and began to whisper, throwing into his voice all the strength of his suppressed, long unacknowledged, love and listened to his own words as if it were Vera and not he who heard them.

'My daughter, Vera! Do you understand what that word means: daughter? My little daughter! My heart, and my blood, and my life! Your old, your very old father, is already grey, is already weak . . .'

Father Ignatius's shoulders shook and his whole heavy frame trembled. Trying to suppress his shaking, Father Ignatius whispered tenderly, as if speaking to a little child.

'Your poor old father . . . asks you—no, my little Vera, he implores! He is crying—he has never wept before! Your sorrow, my little child, your sufferings—they are mine too—more than mine!'

Father Ignatius shook his head.

'More, Verochka! What is death to me, an old man? But for you—if you only knew how delicate and weak and timid you are! Do you remember when you pricked your finger and the blood came, how you cried? My little child, you love me—you love me very much! I know it. Every morning you kiss my hand. Tell me, tell me, what grieves your little head, and I—with these hands—I will suffocate that grief! These hands, Vera, are still strong!'

Father Ignatius shook out his hair.



'Tell me!'

Father Ignatius stared at the wall and stretched out his arms.

'Tell me!'

All was quiet in the room; from the far distance came the long and oft-repeated whistle of an engine.

Father Ignatius looked round with wide staring eyes, as if he saw before him the terrible ghost of the disfigured corpse; he slowly rose from his knees and with an uncertain movement raised his hands with outstretched and stiffened fingers to his head. As he went to the door he whispered in broken accents:

'Tell me!'

And the answer he received was silence.

#### IV

The next day, after an early and solitary dinner, Father Ignatius went to the cemetery for the first time since his daughter's death. It was hot, the place was empty and quiet. It seemed to him as if this sultry day were only an illuminated night; nevertheless, from habit, Father Ignatius carefully straightened his back, looked on all sides severely, and thought that he was still the same as he had always been. He did not notice either the new and terrible weakness in his legs or that his long beard had grown quite white, as if a severe frost had passed over it. The way to the cemetery led down a long, straight street that gradually rose and ended in the white archway of the cemetery gates, which looked like a black and ever open mouth bordered by shining teeth.

Vera's grave was at the far end of the cemetery, beyond the point where the sanded paths came to an end, and Father Ignatius wandered about a long time by winding narrow footpaths between green mounds that were forgotten and neglected by all. In some places he passed crooked monuments grown green

with age, broken railings and large heavy stones that were sunk into the earth and seemed to press it with the morose spite of old age. Vera's grave was close to one of these old stones. It was covered with newly laid turf grown yellow, but all around was green. A mountain ash intertwined with a maple grew close by, and a wide-spreading nut-bush stretched its supple branches and rough, downy foliage over the grave. Father Ignatius sat down on a neighbouring grave to take breath and look around. He cast a glance at the cloudless waste of sky, where the glowing, round sun hung motionless, and it was only now that he felt the deep stillness, unlike anything else, that reigns in a cemetery when there is no wind and the dead leaves do not rustle. Again the thought came to Father Ignatius that this was not stillness but silence. This silence stretched to the very stone walls of the cemetery, crawled over them with difficulty, inundated the town, and only finished in the grey, obstinately fixed, silent eyes.

A shudder passed over Father Ignatius's cold shoulders, and he looked down at Vera's grave. He looked long at the short, yellow blades of grass that had been torn out of some broad field over which the wind blew, and had not had time to take root in the new soil, and he could not understand that there, five feet below this grass, was lying Vera. This nearness seemed inconceivable, and brought to his soul a confused and strange alarm. She, whom Father Ignatius had become accustomed to think of as having disappeared for ever into the dark depths of infinity, was close to him . . . and it was difficult to understand that yet she was not here and would never be here again. It appeared to Father Ignatius that if he said a certain word which he almost felt on his lips, or made a certain movement, Vera would come out of her grave and would again become the same tall, fine girl she had once been; that there would arise not only she but all the other corpses too, who seemed so terribly tangible in their solemn, cold silence.



Father Ignatius took off his broad-brimmed, black hat, arranged his wayward hair, and said in a whisper, 'Vera !'

He felt it would be awkward if any stranger should hear him ; getting on the grave he looked about over the crosses, but there was nobody to be seen ; so he repeated louder, 'Vera !'

It was Father Ignatius's old voice—dry and exacting, and it was strange that a demand made with such force should remain unanswered.

'Vera !'

Loud and persistent called the voice, and when it died away, for a moment it seemed that an indistinct answer came from somewhere below. Father Ignatius looked round once more, and brushing his hair away placed his ear to the hard, prickly turf.

'Vera, tell me !'

With horror Father Ignatius felt that something cold and grave-like poured into his ear and froze his brain, and that Vera spoke . . . but she spoke only with the same long silence. It became still more disturbing and terrifying, and when at last Father Ignatius had strength to tear his head away from the earth, his face was as pale as that of a corpse. It appeared to him that the whole air trembled and fluttered in an audible silence, as if a great storm had arisen on this terrible sea. The silence suffocated him ; it rolled in icy waves over his head and moved his hair ; it broke against his breast, which groaned under the blows. Shaking in every limb and casting sudden, sharp glances around him, Father Ignatius got up slowly and made long, painful efforts to straighten his back and force his trembling body to regain its proud and dignified carriage. And he succeeded. With deliberate slowness Father Ignatius shook the grass off his knees, put on his hat, made the sign of the cross three times over the grave, and went away with a steady, heavy gait. But he did not recognise the familiar cemetery and soon lost himself.

'I have lost my way,' said Father Ignatius with a smile, stopping where several paths crossed.

He stood only for a second, and without thinking turned to the left because he dared not stop and wait. The silence drove him on. It rose from the green graves, it was breathed out of the surly, grey crosses in thin, suffocating streams, it rose from every pore of the earth, which was glutted with corpses. Father Ignatius's step became quicker. He was deafened, and wandered round and round by the same paths. He jumped over the graves, he stumbled against the railings, he caught with his hands at the sharp, tin wreaths; his soft garments tore to shreds. He had but one thought in his head: how to get away. He rushed from side to side, and at last, tall and strange, with spreading cassock and hair streaming in the air, he began to run noiselessly. Had anyone met this wild figure of a man, running, jumping, and gesticulating, had he seen his mad, drawn face, had he heard the dull, hoarse cry that issued from his open mouth, he would have been more frightened than if he had seen a corpse risen from the grave.

Running at full speed Father Ignatius came to the open place at the end of which the low church of the cemetery gleamed white. At the porch an old man was dozing on a low bench; he looked like a pilgrim from a distance, and near him two old beggar women were quarrelling, scolding and attacking each other.

It was getting dark when Father Ignatius reached his home; a light was already burning in Olga Stepanovna's room. Just as he was, dusty and ragged, without taking off his coat or hat, Father Ignatius hurried to his wife's room and fell on his knees.

'Mother! . . . Olia! . . . Have pity on me,' he sobbed. 'I am going mad!'

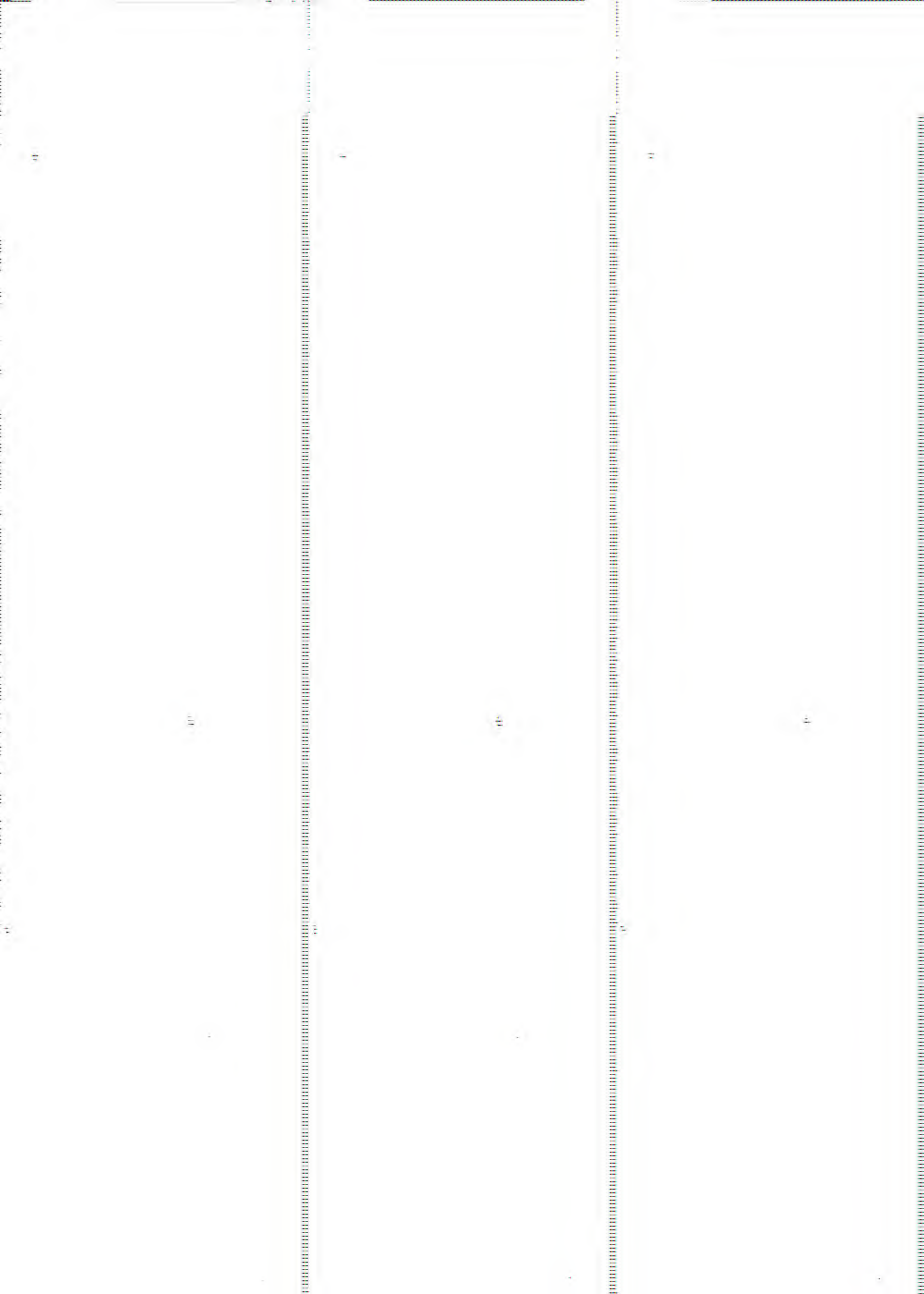
He beat his head on the edge of the table, and sobbed wildly and painfully like a man who had never wept before. He lifted his head, sure of a miracle, sure that his wife would speak to him, sure that she would pity him.



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